



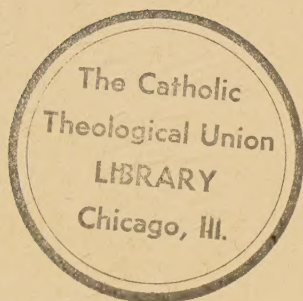
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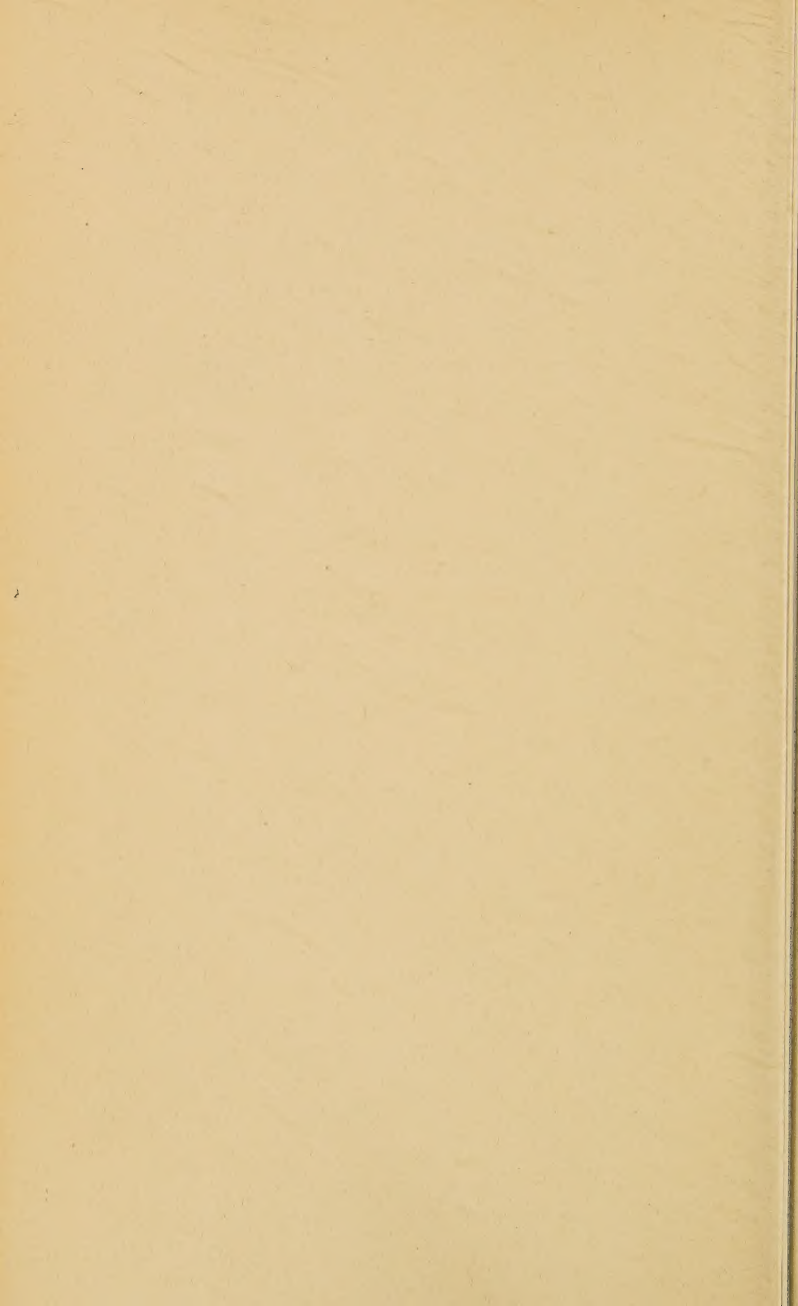
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RETREAT CONFERENCES  
FOR CONVENTS.

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# RETREAT CONFERENCES FOR CONVENTS,

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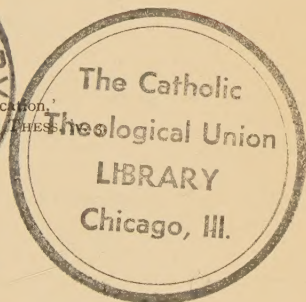
A Series of Exhortations addressed to  
Religious.

**WITHDRAWN**

BY

THE REV. CHARLES COX,

OBLATE OF MARY IMMACULATE.



THIRD SERIES.

R. & T. WASHBOURNE,

1, 2 & 4, PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON.

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1904.



Laudetur Jesus Christus,  
Et Maria Immaculata.

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PERMISSION TO PUBLISH.

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FATHER CHARLES COX, of our Congregation, has the permission of his Superiors to publish a Third Series of 'Retreat Conferences for Convents' written by him.

C. AUGIER,  
*Sup. Gen. O.M.I.*

26, RUE ST. PÉTERSBOURG,  
PARIS, *Ash Wednesday*, 1904.

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*Nilil Obstat.*

THOMAS DAWSON, O.M.I.,  
CENSOR DEPUTATUS.

*Imprimatur.*

✠ FRANCISCUS,  
ARCHIEPISCOPUS WESTMONAST.

*Die 22 Feb., 1904.*

To

ENGLISH-SPEAKING RELIGIOUS

WHO, BEING CONSECRATED TO GOD,

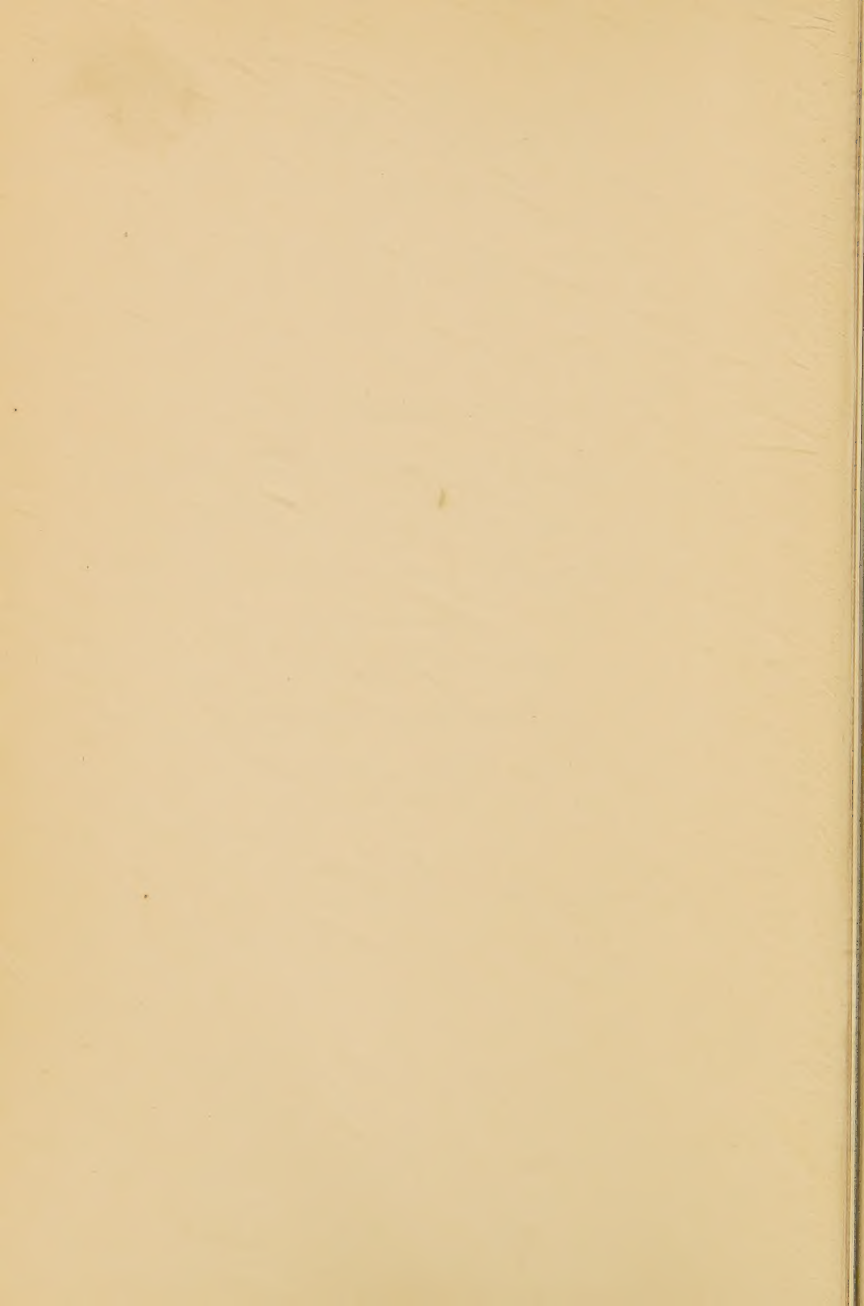
LABOUR WITH MUCH DEVOTEDNESS IN MANY LANDS

FOR HIS GLORY,

THIS BOOK OF EXHORTATIONS

IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED BY

THE AUTHOR.



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N.B.—The three series of ‘Retreat Conferences for Convents’ contain in all seventy Conferences.

\* In the five Conferences marked with an asterisk the Author has to some extent adapted the matter found in the ‘Ecclesiastical Retreat of M. Boyer’ (Sulpician).

# RETREAT CONFERENCES FOR CONVENTS.

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## FIRST EVENING.

---

### I.

#### *OPENING DISCOURSE.—OBJECT OF THE RETREAT.*

‘What sayest thou of thyself?’—ST. JOHN i. 22.

You have been released for a few days from your usual duties in order that you may make your annual retreat. Your gathering here, therefore, is not purposeless, for the object of the retreat is to afford you a special opportunity of examining yourselves about the manner in which you fulfil your various obligations, and of renewing yourselves in dutifulness and piety. During these days of recollection and retirement, our Lord, who ever claims your loving service, will speak to your mind and conscience. He may perhaps address to you some words of reproach, but He will certainly beckon you onwards in the path of fervour, and move you to a more earnest desire of corresponding with the graces He bestows upon you

in your holy vocation. It may become evident to you during the course of the retreat that, even notwithstanding your good dispositions, your conduct has been in various ways faulty. You may come to perceive that, although you have wished to keep your lamps ever trimmed and burning brightly, they have at times not given all the light that was desired and expected. The Lord and Giver of life and grace, the heavenly Bridegroom, whose stewards and servants you are, is on His way to you, and you must be ever ready to meet Him, your conscience clear, your talents put to good account, your hands full of good works, your tongue declaring His praise, your soul held in patience, your desires seeking His good pleasure, and your heart true to His love. Thus will you be numbered among those devout religious, who, having their loins girt and their lamps burning, wait for their Lord, and are prepared to open to Him immediately upon His coming. Of these it is written, 'Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching' (St. Luke xii. 37).

In order that you may thus happily be found ready for the day of the coming of the Bridegroom, be resolved to let your conscience during the retreat speak out truly and distinctly, and be determined to correct whatever may need correction, and in every way to satisfy the demands of grace. A messenger from God now stands at the door, and inquires of your soul: 'What sayest thou of thyself?' Be willing to give a true answer to this question, and avail yourselves now of this favourable opportunity of examining

what indeed should be said of your present manner of life. Who is so certain to stumble and fall as the man who wilfully blinds his own eyes? And who walks in so false and dangerous a light as the man who wilfully deceives himself about himself? What sayest thou of thyself? You are not required to announce the answer from the house-top, or even to whisper it into your neighbour's ear; no, the information is for yourself. Your spiritual welfare and your salvation are matters that, in the first place and most nearly, concern yourself. It does not, however, follow that you are therefore without responsibility for your manner of life, for you are stewards, and the day will yet arrive when it shall be said to you by God Himself: 'Give an account of thy stewardship'; and in the meantime you, and all of us, are required to act 'as good stewards of the manifold grace of God' (1 St. Pet. iv. 10).

We remember the sudden and unprovided end of the wicked and sacrilegious King Baltassar, who was cut short in the enjoyment of his power because he had abused it; and how the writing on the wall foretold as well his doom as the reason of it: 'Mane, Thecel, Phares'—'Thecel,' because he had been weighed in the balance and found wanting (Dan. v. 27). We have heard of religious, too, who were suddenly cut off; was it because they had been unfaithful to their obligations and were found wanting? We also remember how our Lord sent messages by St. John to the Bishops of the seven Churches, pointing out their faults and shortcomings, and threatening them with speedy and dire punishment. To how many

religious who are undutiful and inconstant might not similar messages be addressed? 'Thou hast left thy first charity'; 'I have against thee a few things'; 'Thou hast the name of being alive, and thou art dead; be watchful and strengthen the things that remain which are ready to die, for I find not thy works full before my God'; 'Thou art neither cold nor hot.' We learn from these histories that men lie under a responsibility to God for the fulfilment of the duties of their vocation and for a right use of God's gifts, and that they cannot neglect their obligations with impunity.

Under God's special call, and aided by His grace, religious have advanced beyond the track of the ordinary Christian life; they have left the plain and set their face to the mountain, to ascend the path of perfection. Their steps are guided by Divine counsels and special light; their soul is nourished with rich graces; a new spirit is breathed into them—the spirit of zeal, piety, and mortification; released from worldly cares, they are drawn by heavenly desires; they fight vigorously and without compromise the battle of the spirit against the flesh, and under the inspiration of the Divine promises of a magnificent reward, they disregard all earthly attractions, while, as good religious, they dutifully, patiently, and perseveringly direct their steps to heaven. It is thus matters should be; and happy are those religious who take this view of their calling, and who spend their life accordingly.

What, however, should be said of religious who still love the world, its comforts and its praise; who



are devoid of piety ; who have no becoming zeal for poverty, chastity, and obedience ; who are guilty of deceit, pride, anger, and envy ; and who disedify by their disregard of rule ? How can they be said to have the true spirit of their calling ? Would it not be well if such as these entered seriously into themselves with a view to amendment ? Let us hope that no one among you has to plead guilty to any items of this indictment. Let us hope that when the day of reckoning comes, on which you will have to give an account of your stewardship, you will be able to show that you have, on the contrary, with a true and practical esteem, loved your vocation and been faithful to its obligations ; that you have striven to turn to good account the opportunities it afforded you of pleasing God and advancing in virtue ; and that, in fact, you have availed yourselves thankfully and faithfully of the many graces and means it provided, whereby to reach the measure and degree of perfection to which you were called.

Seeing what your vocation is, and the possibility of your not fully realizing what it demands of you and of your failing to comply faithfully with its obligations, you cannot but recognise how well it would be if you were now to put to yourselves the question : What sayest thou of thyself ? If your conscience cannot satisfy you that you are at least endeavouring to be devout servants of God and good religious, certain points should be examined—namely, you should strive to ascertain in what respects you are reprehensible on account of unsatisfactory conduct, and in what matters there is any

deficiency or neglect ; and you should, moreover, study the circumstances, temptations, and dangers that are the cause of your falls. During your retreat everything is favourable to this desirable examination. There is silence, meditation, instruction, edifying example, and prayer. The retreat itself is a grace, and during it abundant graces are bestowed to render it profitable to your souls. Grace speaks during it, not only to the mind to afford it light and guidance, but also to the heart to soften it, to move it, and to lead it to repentance and amendment, and to a desire of proving more faithful to duty in the future. Grace, too, is given to smoothen and facilitate every step of the way in these paths. Finally, there is at hand God's minister, whose sacred office it is with all charity to receive you, and, if need be, to aid you, when you approach the holy sacrament of Penance. The message, we may then say, comes to you in this time of retreat : ' Behold now is the acceptable time, behold now is the day of salvation ' (2 Cor. vi. 2) ; ' To-day if you shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts ' (Ps. xciv. 8). If you have hitherto been inattentive, or if you have put off your conversion and amendment, the message says, by way both of encouragement and of warning : ' Know that it is now the hour to rise from sleep ' (Rom. xiii. 11). To the perverse—and these, happily, are not among you—there is another message, one that would seem almost useless. It is in the words of St. Paul : ' Take heed lest perhaps there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, to depart from the living God ; but exhort one another every day, while

it is called “to-day,” that none of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin’ (Heb. iii. 12, 13).

The wisdom of these various exhortations cannot be denied; regard them as messages of the Holy Ghost to you. But, alas! there are usually other voices also speaking to you. You are surrounded by countless unseen foes, your spiritual enemies, and you have within you your sluggish nature and your perhaps still active passions, your carnal enemies. All these seek to exercise control over your mind, will, and affections; they, too, have something to say to you. They woo you blandly and deceitfully—but for your overthrow, degradation, and ruin. Even though they fail to gain full mastery over you, they ever strive for it, and they exult in whatever measure of success they achieve. It is necessary for you to be alive to the dangers to which you are exposed. You should be fully persuaded that your carnal and spiritual enemies do indeed gain some measure of success when they cause you to be tepid, negligent, undutiful, insincere, or indifferent; or to defer repentance and amendment; or to undervalue your vocation and what is spiritual; or, finally, to expose yourself to the danger of sin. In all these ways your spiritual well-being is affected, fervour is lessened, laxity creeps in, and religiousness is weakened. Consequently prayer becomes less loved, more faults are committed, and there is less eagerness for grace, and less effort to be humble, patient, meek, mortified, obedient, and charitable.

Your spiritual and carnal enemies will have something to say concerning this annual retreat. Do not

listen to their suggestions, for they will strive to prevent you from drawing profit from it. These enemies may suggest that now is not the time for the retreat, since you are not now prepared to make it, and that you ought not to enter into retreat until you are first disposed for it. They may suggest that you really have no particular need of a retreat now, seeing that you are about as good as your neighbours, and that you are not likely to be any better, and that therefore the time of the retreat will be only so much time lost. They may suggest that you have made retreats before, and that you soon forgot all about them; in fact, that retreats are becoming monotonous, and that they do very little, if any, good. They may even suggest that, although very possibly there are faults that should be corrected, you have neither the heart nor the will to deal with them now, and that therefore the retreat will be a grace thrown away, so it would be better not to make it at all.

These spiritual enemies, not content with trying by such specious arguments to upset your mind and prevent you from entering willingly into retreat, may also seek to deprive you of much of the fruit of it by causing you to be inattentive to the instructions, to resent any remark that might have any application to your own case, or to neglect serious self-examination; or they may, with the same object in view, strive to create dissipation of mind, and to make you indifferent about your state. But are you going to allow your enemies to wreck the work God intends to accomplish by His grace in

your souls during this retreat? Will you take them for your counsellors and guides, and will you blindly follow their leading, or foolishly fall into the snares they so craftily set for your injury or downfall? No; you will spurn the counsels of your enemy, and shake off his thralldom. God is your Counsellor, and to Him you will confidently turn, saying with David: 'Shall not my soul be subject to God? for from Him is my salvation' (Ps. lxi. 2). How admirable were the Psalmist's dispositions at another time, when he prayed, saying: 'Consider, and hear me, O Lord my God; enlighten my eyes that I never sleep in death, lest at any time my enemy say: I have prevailed against him' (Ps. xii. 4, 5). May his sentiments and his prayer be also yours!

You should, in the first place, be fully persuaded that one of the duties of this time of retreat is self-examination — God now calls you to enter into yourselves to discover whatever may be faulty or unsatisfactory. You must first know what your faults are before you seek for the remedy. You should, in the next place, be hopeful that, by God's grace, the retreat will be a time of amendment and of renewal in dutifulness and piety.

Grace during these days of recollection and prayer will not be inoperative or unfruitful; it will work efficaciously in your soul if only you both desire it and correspond with it. How healthy and consoling is that movement by which men seek to cleanse their souls from the stains of sin by sincere sorrow and repentance, and then proceed, under the influence of grace, to rise from their condition of tepidity or

negligence, fully resolved upon amendment ! Better sentiments and holier aspirations then prevail : ‘ This is the change of the right hand of the Most High ’ (Ps. lxxvi. 11). Moved by grace, the soul wishes to correct its failings and to return to dutifulness ; it seeks to walk in the paths of conduct pleasing to God ; in the earnestness of its new dispositions it supplicates Him in the words of David : ‘ Show, O Lord, Thy ways to me, and teach me Thy paths ’ (Ps. xxiv. 4), and it desires to redouble its former fervour. It experiences the generous ardour of Zacheus upon his conversion, who thereupon said to our blessed Saviour : ‘ Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have wronged any man of any thing, I restore him fourfold ’ (St. Luke xix. 8).

When once you have reached this stage of the retreat, and entered on the way of amendment, you will begin to appreciate the retreat. You will feel yourself restored to a state of confidence, and you will not be able to say how far you may be carried by grace, or what degree of perfection you may finally attain. While you hold back and make no effort to rise from your tepidity, these consoling blessings that are consequent upon earnest amendment will be denied you ; but upon your amendment they will be bestowed, and you will not be able to say in what measure they may be accorded, for it is written : ‘ They that seek the Lord shall not be deprived of any good ’ (Ps. xxxiii. 11) ; and again : ‘ The path of the just, as a shining light, goeth forwards and increaseth even to perfect day ’ (Prov. iv. 18). Happy



indeed are those religious who are ever striving to be more and more pleasing to God, more and more faithful to the grace of their vocation. Hasten to join them; do not spare any effort, cost, or sacrifice that may be demanded till you reach their ranks. 'Be reformed,' St. Paul says, 'in the newness of your mind, that you may prove what is the good, and the acceptable, and the perfect will of God' (Rom. xii. 2). Strive by amendment and a truer religiousness to bring yourself ever more and more into conformity with the Divine will in your regard; it beckons you onwards in the holy path of virtuousness and grace.

How lamentable, on the other hand, is the condition of religious who will not amend! They may not have fallen into mortal sin, but their conduct manifests serious indifference to the demands of the religious life; and it happens in the case of some that many seculars are more solicitous than they about pleasing God. They neglect, without scruple, some of their religious exercises, they are often dissipated in manner, they disregard the obligation of silence and other matters of observance, and they moreover disedify by frivolity, impatience, uncharitableness, particular friendships, and discontent with the arrangements of their superiors. They are seen approaching the holy sacraments, and yet no effort appears to be made to correct what is faulty. When they were younger they were noted for their fervour; but they gradually became less self-restrained, less humble, and less observant, and now they have become habitually so. They are no

longer in the ranks of the fervent, and their condition inspires misgiving. The misgiving would be intensified if they made their annual retreat but failed to take measures for their correction. To such as these God, who desires their conversion, addresses Himself in warning: 'Will not you then fear Me, saith the Lord; and will you not repent at My presence?' (Jer. v. 22).

If you would profit by the grace God offers you in the retreat, let there be self-examination and effort at amendment, and make all necessary provision against those dangers and temptations which have led to your spiritual injury in the past. With this serious programme before you, you have matter for your mind, occupation for your time, and subject for prayer. Every day will bring fresh matter for consideration, and should elicit new interest in the work of the retreat. In attending to what is required, there should not be disturbance of mind, but conversion of heart; not useless regrets concerning the past, but rather practical steps decided upon for the future. There should not be any over-anxiety, or any yielding to scrupulousness, but let everything be done in a spirit of desire to please God and to profit by the lessons of the retreat, and of confidence in God's help, compassion, and mercy.

I have said that you should put to yourselves the question: What sayest thou of thyself? Others, too, have no doubt something to say of you. Have you ever given others reason to speak ill of you? Have you always edified your neighbour by your words, your works, and your religious conduct? If you

have not, be assured that if you go through the retreat well you will afterwards make amends in the eyes of others for what has been faulty in the past.

With a view, then, to please God, to edify your neighbour, and to bring blessings upon yourselves, let it be your endeavour to avail yourselves to the utmost of the graces of the retreat. Resolve, therefore, during it to practise silence and recollection, to avoid unnecessary distractions, to devote a certain amount of time to prayer, and to prepare yourselves to make a good Confession. If you wish to be dutiful, such should be your conduct. Let not, then, any spirit of heedlessness or perversity prevent you from corresponding with God's loving designs in calling you to this retreat, but be fully determined to turn it to good account, and to place no obstacle to your correction and amendment.

I will now suggest the points for your meditation to-morrow morning. Consider, in the first place, the benefit resulting from self-examination. 'What sayest thou of thyself?' It helps you to know your faults and the causes and occasions of them, and this knowledge should lead you to a renewal of fidelity to religious dutifulness. It comes, then, that by serious self-examination you in some measure forestall the judgment into which God will hereafter enter with you. Let your examination throughout the retreat be thorough.

In the second place, guard yourselves against losing the benefit of the retreat. Your spiritual enemies will not be idle. As they are at other times ever laying snares to lead you into various faults and

to injure your spiritual welfare, so now in these days of grace they will strive to deprive you of some, if not of all, of the benefit of your retreat, seeking to retain you in such faultiness as tepidity, laxity, neglect, or indifference. You must watch and pray, and not suffer your enemy to counsel you, but look for the guidance of heavenly wisdom.

In the third place, you should recognise that the practical fruit of the retreat must be amendment. Consider the many motives that should lead you to desire it and direct your efforts towards it. Rejoice, then, at the prospect of this happy result, and finally resolve to enter fully into the spirit of the retreat, and to comply faithfully with its regulations.

In conclusion, now and in your meditation beg God's blessing upon the work of the retreat ; invoke the light, guidance, and support of the Holy Spirit, and seek courage and fervour from the Sacred Heart. And may your beloved Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, your Guardian Angels, and your heavenly Patrons, aid you by their powerful intercession, and obtain that the retreat may be fruitful for your sanctification. God grant that you may be duly attentive to the inspirations of grace, for in these days it is said : ' I will show thee the way of wisdom, I will lead thee by the paths of equity ' (Prov. iv. 11).

## FIRST DAY.

---

### II.

#### *VENIAL SIN.*

‘ Sanctify yourselves, and be ye holy, because I am the Lord your God.’—LEV. xx. 7.

THE sorrows of a devout religious proceed from her sins and her infidelity to grace. Even when these are attributable more to a passing or sudden weakness than to deliberate or unchecked perversity, they pain her sensitive soul and bring a dark cloud over its bright serenity. Yet that malice which would lead her to turn away from God is happily unknown to her. Like the faithful people of Israel under the cruel persecutions of King Antiochus, she would choose ‘ rather to die than to be defiled ’ (1 Macc. i. 65) by mortal sin. Again and again she gives expression in her prayers to her desire never to offend God ; but, alas ! human frailty is such that, notwithstanding her desire and her prayers, she falls into various venial sins. Her repentance is daily, and her effort to avoid these falls continual. All are subject to similar human frailty ; would that all were in the same dispositions of detestation of sin !

God invites all men to holiness of life; their spiritual well-being depends upon their correspondence with this invitation. Holy Church expects religious, on account of the special character of their vocation, to have a zeal for their spiritual welfare, and therefore for holiness of life. Many among them have even to be to others teachers and guides; they have, both by word and example, to teach others to love God, to practise virtue and the duties of religion, and to be dutiful in life. All are bound to tend to perfection. They walk in those same ways of self-denial and piety that have been trodden by religious who are now canonized Saints. When you reflect, as you should do during the retreat, upon your obligations and opportunities as religious, ask yourselves what is at present your sense of your duty to aim at purity of heart and holiness of life, and what is your present effort in this direction.

As you cannot be said to strive after the holiness to which you are called if your affections are not detached from everything sinful and unworthy, and if you do not make serious effort to avoid venial sin, we will take for the subject of this conference the proper regulation of our affections and the evil of venial sin—two matters that are intimately connected one with the other.

If we ask ourselves what is the spring of our actions, what sets us in motion, the true answer is that it is our heart—in other words, our affections. It may, therefore, be said that until this citadel is captured for God, the enemy holds the key of the situation, and that, until we give our affections dutifully



to God, to what He demands and to what will please Him, we are reserving for ourselves the treasure He claims above all else. God tells us this where He says by His prophet : ' You shall seek Me, and shall find Me : when you shall seek Me with all your heart ' (Jer. xxix. 13). He will not have regard to us except we give Him all our affection. ' Yet so, if thou seek Him with all thy heart, and all the affliction of thy soul ' (Deut. iv. 29). This sincere love of God, which only can satisfy the Divine claims, will have its marked influence upon our life, and especially upon our spiritual progress.

The duty of our sanctification requires that we should struggle against venial sin, and strive also to correct our ordinary imperfections. Our success in these respects will, to a great extent, depend upon the proper control of our affections. Our affection is the measure of our earnestness and of our merit before God. God said to Samuel : ' Nor do I judge according to the look of man ; for man seeth those things that appear, but the Lord beholdeth the heart ' (1 Kings xvi. 7). What, we should therefore ask, does He see in our heart ? Our affections are, alas ! very wayward, and they cling too much and too often to creatures. They are often too much centred in ourselves. If we had no supernatural faith, and if there was no such claim upon us as Divine charity, who would blame us for loving ourselves and the creatures round about us ? But we know by faith

- how miserable we are, and how insignificant is all creation when compared with God, the Sovereign Good ; and we further know how dangerous is all

inordinate affection for creatures. Having this knowledge, why are we so unreal and so dilatory in lifting up our affections to God, that they may be always and fully swayed by, and subservient to, His good pleasure? Thus would they be purified, ennobled, sanctified, and rendered meritorious. 'Sanctify yourselves, and be ye holy, because I am the Lord your God.'

Our Lord says to every one of us: 'Where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also' (St. Matt. vi. 21). We will not easily disregard or turn away from what we value as our treasure, and our service and our effort to please will follow the direction of our affections. If, therefore, our affections are given to creatures, we shall serve creatures; but if they are given to God, we shall serve Him, and strive on no account to offend Him. God's most righteous claims and our own interest demand that all our affections should be centred in God, and, aided by the bright light of faith and by grace, we should ever endeavour to school our affections accordingly.

Every thoughtful Christian is willing to admit that his affections need guidance, correction, and proper control. They must be controlled by reason and religion, and we should, above all, strive to yield them up fully and constantly to the movements of grace; this is the secret of true sanctity. Have we seriously endeavoured to do this? Have we understood this secret? We all are, however, faulty—some more so than others—and we are liable to be drawn to evil even against our will; but there is no reason why we should follow the evil attraction or inclination. It

is, however, ever there, and we must struggle against it. Let us not be discouraged by the evidence of evil inclinations in ourselves, or scandalized if we detect them in our neighbour also. They arise from a concupiscence or a perversity to which man has been prone since his fall. Even those called to the holiness of the religious state cannot expect to be free from every evil tendency. This tendency is not the same in all. To discover of what particular kind ours is is a knowledge necessary to our spiritual welfare. How shall we know it? Our temptations and our past falls have revealed the enemy. To have the evil tendency is not, indeed, a sin, and need not disturb our conscience; but we are bound to struggle against it, and to yield to it would be sin. Perhaps our venial sins may be traced to it.

Our Lord says that we cannot serve two masters; so we cannot be true servants of God while we wilfully pamper, or fail to fight against, any inclination or affection that would lead us to offend Him. We must not show any weakness in dealing with such an inclination, but we must strive to control it and get rid of it. This may be a lifelong struggle. How many, alas! are only half-hearted in the effort! Why, we may ask, are so many repentances futile? Why do so many penitents relapse into their former condition? Why in their spiritual life are so many persons living only a languishing existence? Why does not the religious state yield more abundant fruits of sanctity? Why? Because men do not deal sternly, strenuously, and perseveringly with their evil tendencies, and this would seem to show that

they love their weaknesses. They are carried about and led astray by every whim, attraction, movement, or assault, and they do not contend vigorously with it; thus they come to yield to evil, to neglect duty, and to displease God in one way or another. This will account for most of our venial sins. If men do not in every case give way without opposition to the lead of their uncontrolled affections and evil inclinations, they yet often allow them, as they may fancy, to lie dormant; but there is really no such dormant condition for our affections: they are always, perhaps secretly and insidiously, influencing us.

The conviction should be forced upon our mind by these considerations that it is our duty to control and correct our affections. I have already said that they should be controlled by reason and religion. We must not permit them to attach themselves or to lead us to what right reason would not commend as wise, honourable, and profitable, or to what religion would not sanction as good and pleasing to God. We should zealously and constantly oppose, check, and remove every affection for what is evil, and, as a corrective, we should foster pious affections, and such as are noble, charitable, and dutiful. The control and correction of our affections enter largely into the real warfare of the spiritual life, and this duty supposes that we shall use a constant watchfulness, and seek strength from prayer and the holy sacraments. To give our affections a right direction we must take a proper view of what our duty in every respect is and of its claims upon us. We must ever strive to satisfy these claims, not by con-

strait or with repugnance, but willingly and faithfully. 'Whatsoever you do, do it from the heart as to the Lord' (Col. iii. 23). We should bring ourselves to love duty, and this will make the yoke sweet and the burden light. While thus bringing our affections into line with the claims of duty, we must carefully protect them against evil. We must, therefore, avoid whatever might kindle or excite dangerous tendencies; and if we perceive within us the first movement of any such tendencies, we must at once set ourselves in mind and heart in opposition to them, and persist in this opposition. To be indifferent or sluggish would be to court disaster.

The place these considerations have in this conference on venial sin will be understood when I say that our venial sins are attributable to ill-regulated affections. If we do not control, correct, and guard our affections, and subject them to God and duty, they will lead us from grace; and remissness in exercising proper control, when not so serious as to lead to so disastrous a result, will be followed by many venial faults. Let us encourage ourselves in this struggle with our affections by the reflection that our first victories will lessen its hardship, for each victory will render the task easier. Gradually, with our efforts and persistence, our wayward heart, turning from all voluntary evil, will become fixed in holy and dutiful desires and devout affections; it will yield itself readily to the healthy influences of Divine grace; the 'old man' within us will be conquered and moulded according to the likeness of the 'perfect man' (Eph. iv. 13), and then our venial

sins will be lessened in number and in kind. Let us desire this happy result and labour for it.

Let us now pass from the consideration of the proper regulation of our affections to that of the evil of venial sin. We should be convinced that a healthy religious character cannot be maintained without an effort to avoid venial sin. It is not expected, much as it is to be desired, that even religious will live free from all sin; what is demanded is that effort should be made to avoid it, and that the commission of venial sin should give rise to sincere regret and repentance. The condition of religious who fail to make this effort, and who are unmoved and callous when they fall, should be regarded as unsatisfactory and critical. We may regard it as impossible for religious to maintain fervour while they make little of venial sin, and commit it persistently, without effort to check themselves; for religious fervour supposes an ardent and dutiful love of God, or at least an efficacious desire to have this love. The deliberate offence of God, even when only venial, is inconsistent with it, for it manifests a tendency to break with Him. It moreover weakens our spiritual activity, and tends to strengthen our evil inclinations. This is all the more evident when the offence is repeated without care or scruple, and when venial sins are multiplied.

It is difficult to draw a clear distinction in the matter of culpability between the religious who knowingly continues to commit these offences and one who has but little sense of her obligations as a religious. We may suppose such a case. This



religious is remiss in her whole conduct, she does pretty well as she pleases, she neglects her exercises, she idles her time, she resents control, she regulates her life according to her own whims and fancies, she offends by uncharitable speech, she disedifies her neighbour, and she is unmindful of her spiritual advancement. She would seem to live in habitual sin, the gravity of which, while remaining venial, it would be difficult to gauge. The condition of life of such a religious is unhealthy, and to a great extent unprofitable ; it is attended by many venial sins, and is also a source of danger to others. We may be tempted to ask if this religious will always continue in the state of grace. She no doubt fell away from piety and observance by degrees, and at first her faults were not so serious ; but now they are many, and they seem not to cause her any concern. St. Bernard says : ‘ They who fall into grave disorders begin by those that are the least.’\* The steps of the man who is approaching a precipice are, indeed, short, but they bring him ever nearer to the fatal fall.

We will examine briefly what venial sin is in itself, and what are its effects and consequences.

Venial sin is so called because, as it does not of itself exclude those who are guilty of it from the attainment of eternal life—the punishment incurred by it being temporal, and not everlasting—it must necessarily be considered pardonable. It has, however, a malice of its own, which is measured by the

\* ‘ A minimis incipiunt qui in magna prouunt.’—‘ Tract. de Ordin. Vitæ.’

act done and the dispositions of the offender. When a man commits mortal sin he offends God in a grave matter, and regardless of the consequences. Preferring his own will to God's, he absolutely disregards God's command, and he thus becomes God's enemy. There is not all this malice in the case of venial sin, for then the offender would not do the act if it was of a gravity to constitute mortal sin; he acts more guardedly and with less perversity, and in not so grave a matter. He does not wish to cast off God's yoke altogether, or to follow his own caprice or evil inclination to the extent of breaking with Almighty God; so he still respects God's claim to his love and service, and does not therefore become His enemy.\*

Our duty to God, who is the Sovereign Good and our Last End, and our own spiritual interests, require that we should seriously endeavour to avoid venial sin. If we consider God's claim to our entire worship and obedience, and to all our love and gratitude, and if we measure these claims by the infinity of His perfections, and of His love and goodness displayed towards us, His lowly and erring creatures, what view should we take of any sin, even venial, committed against Him? We might, indeed,

\* '(Alio modo) dicitur veniale, quia non habet in se unde veniam non sequatur, vel totaliter, vel in parte; in parte quidem, sicut cum habet in se aliquid diminuens culpam, ut cum fit ex infirmitate vel ignorantia—et hoc dicitur veniale ex causa; in toto autem ex eo quod non tollit ordinem ad ultimum finem, unde non meretur pœnam æternam sed temporalem.'—ST. THOMAS, 1a 2æ, q. 88, art. 2.

plead in excuse human frailty, but the offence, considered in itself, we would condemn as base. We should therefore strive to inspire ourselves with a due horror of the malice of venial sin. Let us pray with David: 'Teach me goodness, and discipline, and knowledge' (Ps. cxviii. 66). Teach me, O Lord, those things that are pleasing to Thee, and grant me the grace to love them and do them, and never to offend Thee; 'let my heart be undefiled in Thy justifications' (Ps. cxviii. 80).

We judge of the evil of venial sin not only by its malice, but also by its effects and consequences. These are seen in the punishment incurred, the danger to which venial sin exposes us, and various evils produced in the soul. We will make a few reflections upon these consequences.

A religious may at times feel convinced that various miseries or sufferings and disappointments experienced have been permitted by God as a punishment of her venial sins—for venial sin may be visited in this life by such punishments, but those that will follow in the future life are more terrible. When venial sin has not been atoned for in this world it is punished in the next by the suffering endured in purgatory. The Doctors of the Church teach that this suffering is far in excess of any experienced in this life. We shrink from the least pain, yet, by committing venial sin, we render ourselves liable to the severest pains, and these, if we do not escape them by repentance and indulgences or atonement in this life, will have to be endured in their full force. To intensify our conviction of the evil of

venial sin, let us remember that these terrible pains are inflicted by the Infinite Justice of God, who loves the holy souls in purgatory, but who must cleanse them, and no less suffering than what He there employs can do this. We know nothing of the intensity of this suffering, nor how long it must be endured; but it is meted out by Infinite Justice, and it cannot be in excess of what is strictly merited.\* Although the place, intensity, and length of endurance of this suffering are shrouded in mystery, enough is yet known to move us to compassion for the souls in purgatory, and to inspire us with a keen dread of the pains there endured. We see, then, in what way venial sin must be expiated, and our mind should be impressed with a lively sense of its evil, as manifested in its consequent punishment, and also with a firm determination to avoid it.

The evil of venial sin, in the next place, is seen in this, that when men commit it heedlessly and continue to do so, they expose themselves to the danger of falling into mortal sin. How especially sad it is when a religious acts in this manner! Does she seriously reflect upon the consequences? If she continues in her remissness and unfaithfulness to her obligations, the day will probably come when, by some grievous fall, she will lose the grace of God, and incur the punishment of hell. The descent may be gradual, but is it not dangerous to be on the downward path? God warns us by the holy writer,

\* 'Secundum enim quod peccata venialia sunt majoris vel minoris adhærentiæ vel gravitatis, citius vel tardius per ignem purgantur.'—ST. THOMAS, 1a 2æ, q. 89, art. 2.

where he says : 'He that contemneth small things, shall fall by little and little' (Ecclus. xix. 1). Although many venial sins do not constitute a mortal sin, the offender exposes himself to the fatal fall by reason of his unsatisfactory dispositions. St. Thomas says that by the habit of not subjecting his will in smaller matters to what is right (*debito ordini*), he is disposed not to submit it even when there is question of graver matter (*ordini ultimi finis*). Let us not, by falling recklessly into the habit of venial sin, weaken our spiritual activity, lest our enemies should overcome us ; let us not give force to our evil propensities, or encourage our weaknesses, lest they should finally enslave us. How sadly Samson and Solomon, the strong and the wise, fell ! How sadly, too, have fallen many remiss religious who have made little of venial sins ! Their conscience became seared, religiousness less real, and the mists of indifference and unfaithfulness more dense—then came the fatal fall from grace.

Lastly, the evil of venial sin is seen in the various injurious effects produced in the soul. Since every venial sin brings upon the soul guilt and temporal punishment, venial sin cannot but be attended by consequences impairing the soul's spiritual life and vitality. St. Augustine, using figurative language, says that venial sins deform the soul as with blisters and scabby swellings, so as not to permit it to come, except with great confusion, to the embraces of its heavenly Spouse. St. Thomas teaches that venial sin is prejudicial to the soul's beauty, since it impedes the action of charity and the other virtues.

Another theologian (Billuart) says that it retards man's affection from being borne readily towards God, and that it is an obstacle to fervour and perfection. This reason should weigh with religious who are bound ever to tend to perfection, to inspire them with earnestness in striving to avoid venial sin. It should not surprise those religious who make but feeble effort to do this if they find themselves losing the spirit of devotion, and see their fervour diminish. Father Lallemand says that 'the slightest faults and the least imperfections, when voluntary, inflict four evils on the soul: first, they darken and blind it more and more; secondly, they sully it; thirdly, they disturb and oppress it; and, fourthly, they diminish its strength.'

Ask yourselves if you have not, at one period or another of your religious life, experienced some such results, arising from diminution of fervour and carelessness in your exercises and conduct. Have you felt a want of relish for spiritual doctrine, and an overclouding of your mental vision? and, at such a time, have you not known that your ideas and views were mundane and unreligious? Have you had a sense of being displeasing to God, and of acting with but little or no merit in His eyes? Have you, moreover, lost calm and serenity both interiorly and exteriorly, and felt the yoke of the religious life heavy and disagreeable? Have you, finally, felt a loss of energy, and been careless and indifferent about the work of your perfection? Why was all this if not that your soul was sick owing to venial sin, and in danger, perhaps, of a serious disease?



There was reason at such a time for strong and speedy remedies, for such a condition of soul was not compatible with the religiousness and fervour demanded by your holy vocation ; for a religious cannot be said to seek God as He should be sought, or to love Him as He should be loved, while she makes little of venial sin, and does not seriously endeavour to avoid it.

Human frailty will always be with us, but that is no reason why we should not struggle against it. We must not pretend to shelter ourselves under specious excuses when we sin ; we must sincerely regret our falls, and watch over ourselves more exactly after them. If religious offend often, let them see if it does not arise from habits of infidelity to duty and continual breaches of the rule ; from attachment to their predominant failing, or a spirit of carelessness and indifference ; from immortification and remissness in controlling the senses ; from a want of due submission to authority, or regard for their neighbour ; or, finally, from neglect of meditation and prayer. When they have discovered the cause, they should seek to apply the required remedy.

Religious should especially seek to avail themselves of the graces and helps derived from a fervent approach to the holy sacrament of Penance. Although venial sins may be forgiven by repentance and salutary religious practices apart from this sacrament,\*

\* Treating of the remission of the guilt of venial sin, Billuart says : '*Nullum peccatum veniale remittitur sine aliqua poenitentia : non sufficit habitualis, non requiritur formalis, sed*

we should not be indifferent to the special benefits attached to this channel of forgiveness and grace. According to the teaching and terminology of theologians, only mortal sin is the 'necessary matter' for the sacrament of Penance, while venial sin is the 'voluntary but sufficient matter.' Apart from the sacrament, forgiveness of venial sins may be obtained by sentiments of true compunction, especially at Holy Mass and Holy Communion; also by using the sacramentals of the Church, and by making fervent acts of charity.

Strive ever at greater purity of heart, at more sincere devotion, and at greater exactitude in exterior duties, and then you may confidently expect greater freedom from venial faults. God's special providence will then watch over you, and your affections will be more perfectly schooled, with a commensurate result of dutifulness and fervour. You have only to desire this happy result. to pray for it, and to labour to realize it; then will God's grace be at hand to bring it to you. Let these be your firm resolutions in the present retreat, and may you reap the blessings they should have for their reward; for it is written: 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.' 'Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.'

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requiritur et sufficit virtualis. . . . Pœnitentia virtualis est, cum aliquis hoc modo fertur secundum affectum in Deum, ut quidquid sibi occurreret quod eum ab hoc motu retardaret, displiceret ei, et doleret se hæc commisisse, etiamsi actu de illo non cogitet.'

### III.

#### *OUR IMPERFECTIONS.*

‘Be you therefore perfect.’—ST. MATT. v. 48.

THESE are words that our Lord in His wisdom addresses to all His followers; they tell us of His loving desire of our perfection, and of the effort we should therefore make to be perfect. They point out to us a calling, if they do not also express a command. How do we respond to it? A commentator of Holy Scripture, treating of this passage, writes: ‘If soldiers desire to be most strenuous in battle, pupils most learned in school, mechanics most clever in their art, and servants most assiduous in the service of their master, why should not Christians, called by Christ to holiness and perfection, desire to be most holy and most perfect?’ (Corn. a Lap.).

Let us endeavour to understand our Lord’s meaning. He says: ‘Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect.’ He does not demand impossibilities; He does not insist upon our attaining perfection as it is in our heavenly Father, but upon our imitating Him—that since He is perfect, we also should strive to be perfect accord-

ing to the measure of grace accorded to us. St. Leo explains the meaning, saying that God's goodness should be reflected in us as in a mirror; and we seem to read St. Paul's interpretation of the words, where he writes: 'Be ye therefore followers of God, as most dear children' (Eph. v. 1). Let us understand our Lord's words as demanding that, if we wish to be children of God and heirs of His kingdom, we must aim at a higher standard of perfection than that which non-Christians put before themselves. It should be our study and our delight to imitate our heavenly Father, who is infinite in every perfection, and therefore to desire and strive for the perfection of every virtue.

While we admit that our Lord's words are so clear in their meaning as not to leave any doubt about the perfection He desires in His followers, we do not pretend that a man would necessarily be guilty of sin if he were to fail to attain this perfection, but we would deem him imperfect. There may be various imperfections even in those who are free from every kind of sin. If you earnestly desire to please God and to correspond in all things with His wishes, and if with this end in view you are really practical in your effort to be perfect, it will follow that you will strive not only to avoid venial sin, but you will also struggle with your imperfections. There are narrow-minded men who would feel hurt and resentful if others were to try to equal them in what particularly distinguishes them from others; but how different is the case with God! He, on the contrary, ever invites you to approach nearer and nearer to Him. His

desire is expressed in our Lord's words, 'Be ye perfect,' 'Learn of Me.' His Apostles also declare this Divine desire. St. Peter bids you be fashioned 'according to Him that hath called you, who is Holy' (1 St. Pet. i. 15). St. Paul says: 'This is the will of God, your sanctification' (1 Thess. iv. 3). Where St. James counsels patience, he does so, as he says, 'That you may be perfect and entire, failing in nothing' (St. Jas. i. 4). Led by our Lord's invitation and exhortation, and by the teaching of His Apostles, you should, then, desire to overcome your various imperfections, and even strive to become perfect.

It may seem to some that what is termed an imperfection cannot be easily, if at all, distinguished from a venial sin. This, however, is not the case; but undoubtedly, on the other hand, what is venial sin is always an imperfection. We are not ordinarily held to commit sin if we do not reach perfection in virtue or in various respects in our conduct. If in zeal, charity, patience, piety, and recollectedness, we do not attain the degree of perfection reached by the saints, or by many of God's servants now living, it does not therefore follow that we are guilty of any sin, but only that in these respects we, when compared with them, are imperfect. It is probable that in prayer and zeal St. Barnabas was not as fervent as St. Paul, in which case he would have been less perfect, but not therefore guilty of any sin. We should be careful not to accuse ourselves in confession of relative imperfection—that is, of our not being as humble, charitable, pious, or obedient as others—

when we are not conscious of actual faults in any of these respects.

There are, however, imperfections—and of these we are now treating—that lead to venial faults and render us less disposed for grace. It would be difficult to mention every kind of such imperfections, but among them would be a shortening of our devotions, not seeking profit from meditation and pious exercises, putting off confession, sloth in rising, reluctance to obey, neglect of points of the rule, censoriousness, moroseness, selfishness, immortification, shirking duty, wasting time, useless reading, unrecollection, unguardedness of the senses, disregard of punctuality and good order, unwillingness to oblige others, touchiness of character, eagerness for gossip, uncalled-for meddling with the concerns of others, and routinal apathy. As to these and such-like imperfections, our confessor might, if he saw well, permit us to include them in our confession; but our motive in mentioning them should be genuinely good—as, for instance, our desire to correct them, or our intention by our accusation to humble ourselves. We should not mention them simply to provide abundance of matter or to manifest how exact we are, nor should we do so in an historical fashion without feeling confused and humbled on account of them.

There are other imperfections than these just referred to, differing from them in kind and gravity; and I here speak of them lest it might appear that they do not call for particular notice. They should however, be classed with venial sins, for it is difficult to see how those religious in whom they appear can



be held free from venial fault. These other imperfections are such as carelessness and irreverence in prayer and in receiving the holy sacraments, neglect of duty, want of proper consideration for the neighbour and unlawfully causing him pain or annoyance, harsh judgments, impatience, hastiness of temper, conceit, self-praise, expensive habits and causing unnecessary expense, resenting the correction of superiors and murmuring at their orders, and independence of authority. The unreligious conduct which these imperfections suppose cannot but be attended by various venial faults, and it is in itself wrong; every confessor would therefore accept the accusation of faultiness in these various respects.

In order to convince ourselves of the desirability of correcting our imperfections, and to move us to make the effort necessary to do this, let us briefly consider some of the reasons that should influence us in this matter. We should strive to correct our imperfections because of our call and duty to seek God in all sincerity, and to aim at purity of heart.

In the first place—and this is the first reason to influence us—God demands of all His intelligent creatures that they should strive at all times to please Him. He claims this dutiful service from the angels in heaven and from men upon earth. He bids us seek Him—that is, have Him in view in all we do. The religious soul, therefore, cannot enjoy solid and constant peace unless resolved upon this. We should be instigated in our effort thus to please God by the conviction that the more dutiful and perfect we become, the more fully we enter into His

gracious designs, the nearer we shall approach to Him and He to us, and the dearer we shall be to the Sacred Heart. We should seek our satisfaction in this way, for only herein can our soul find true satisfaction.

The Holy Scriptures in several places inculcate the lesson of seeking God, which is no other than the lesson of giving glory and satisfaction to Him who made us, and of tending ever to Him. Thus the prophet Isaias says: 'Seek ye the Lord while He may be found' (Isa. lv. 6); and the prophet Amos: 'Seek the Lord, and you shall live' (Amos v. 6). Especially are religious, who have consecrated their life to God, bound to strive to please Him, and it may even be said that they forfeit their right to the name of religious if they disregard this duty. To fulfil it so as fully to relish the satisfaction it yields requires more than a mere superficial effort; their soul energies, and life should be dedicated to this service of pleasing God, since the character of their vocation demands this entire devotedness. There are some who fail to understand this demand. If religious were to turn to creatures for their satisfaction or to seek any other end in life, if they were to be indifferent to their condition of imperfection, and even if their manner of seeking to please God was wanting in true earnestness, there would be in such conduct an evident unbecomingness, and it would prove a hindrance to many graces and to a fervent spirit of devotion, and they could not expect to enjoy true peace. If religious seek their satisfaction and consolation in creatures, they do not seek

them where they are to be found, and they are not to be found where they seek them.

In the second place, we should strive to correct our imperfections, because it is God's desire that we should aim at purity or unsulliedness of heart. The servants of God on earth should wish to resemble as far as possible His servants, the angels, in heaven. To approach infinite sanctity the heart must be holy and pure; our Lord says: 'Be you therefore perfect.' . . . 'Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.' Father Lallemant says that purity of heart consists in having nothing therein that is, in however small a degree, opposed to God and the operation of His grace; and he lays it down as the first means towards the attainment of perfection. If we would succeed in our efforts to please God, it is necessary that we should cultivate purity of heart; and this demands that we should not only avoid sin, but that we should also strive to correct those imperfections that are an obstacle to our spiritual progress. If a religious makes no effort to do this, and is not concerned to do it, but is satisfied to remain as she is, we may ask if she is seriously tending to perfection. As fervent religious, take a lofty view—it is the true view—of your calling, and be resolved dutifully to remove all obstacles to purity of heart, and, with this intention, recognise the duty, not only of studiously avoiding those imperfections which are inseparable from venial sin, but also those others which tend to lead to it; for since these latter, as well as the former, are an obstacle to grace and an impediment to religious perfection, you should at

least desire to correct them. This is what I am endeavouring to impress upon you in the present conference.

Let me, however, say that while we should be resolved upon seeking God in the path of religious perfection, and therefore upon doing all we can to please Him, and while we should recognise the duty of correcting whatever is faulty and imperfect in ourselves, we must yet be careful not to harass our mind by false or exaggerated notions of what is demanded. It may be at once conceded that if we are earnestly endeavouring to avoid venial sin, we may certainly feel happy in our being in the way of salvation and well established in grace, and we may rightly consider that our soul is in a healthy condition. Although this is so, more is yet to be desired, as I have already shown;\* for we should not be content only with not being sick, or even with being in health, we ought to desire robust health. In other words, we should not consider it enough to be free from attachment to venial faults, but we should, moreover, wish to attain the perfection of religious virtue. This supposes a higher standard of living, one that must embrace the effort to overcome our ordinary imperfections; for these are drawbacks to our spiritual advancement and profit—they, as it were, clog the wheels of the machine, impede action, and reduce power. If we take no notice of them and do not remove them, will it not be difficult to keep the

\* ‘ . . . Quum totus in quoddam holocaustum (homo religiosus) pro divina gloria sese obtulerit atque continuo se mactare quasi cogatur.’—LEHMKUHL, i. No. 488.

machine in good working order while labouring always under such disadvantage? Could it with truth be said that we are complying with our Lord's injunction, 'Be you therefore perfect,' or that we have a zeal for our spiritual advancement?

Let us now ask ourselves in what light we should regard our imperfections, and what our conduct should be with regard to them.

Imperfection is inseparable from our present existence, but let not that be deemed a reason why we should disregard what is known to be imperfect when, by our efforts, moved and supported by grace, we may lessen our imperfections or keep them in check. We may compare venial sins to the storms of greater or less violence which the noble ship encounters on the ocean, but our ordinary imperfections to the restless waves over which she must ever bound while on her voyage to her destination. It is to be feared that, notwithstanding all our efforts, we shall have to contend with our imperfections during the whole course of this life.

Let us look upon our soul as a mirror in which should be reflected God's image and perfections. We have seen that St. Leo regarded it in this light. Alas! how far our soul is from yielding even a satisfactory reflection! What, however, should be said if we make no effort to improve, seeing that grace is offered us to enable us to do so, and that the helps provided in the holy state of religion are so abundant? We must remove the dust of our imperfections from the mirror. Let us also regard our soul as the spouse of Christ, the object of His special

care and affection. How little are we worthy of that gracious, surpassing love ! But shall we not strive to become more worthy ? Our soul should be suitably adorned with fervent piety and all the virtues demanded in religious, and we should remove everything that is unseemly. Our imperfections tend to lessen the soul's beauty and to weaken its strength and fervour. We know that the purer the whiteness of a robe is, the more noticeable and unseemly do any spots of mud appear on it ; that the more delicate any mechanism is, the more easily it is injured by dust or grit ; and that the more sensitive any of our bodily organs are, the more keenly they feel any roughness or injury ; but what is so pure, so delicate, or so sensitive as the soul in the state of grace ? And the greater the grace with which God has adorned it, the more potently is it affected by faults and imperfections. This explains why devout persons experience such confusion and sorrow when they are guilty of a fault, for the more perfect are disturbed by imperfections and falls that do not seem to trouble the less perfect. Let us, then, be convinced that our ordinary imperfections are injurious to our soul's interests, since they are impediments in some measure to the operations of grace.

From the various considerations which we have passed in review, we should learn what ought to be our conduct with regard to our imperfections ; evidently we should ever strive to correct them. We have already seen that this effort is demanded by our duty to seek God and to aim at purity of heart, and that it is God's will that we should make it. The



angel said to St. John : ' He that is just, let him be justified still ; and he that is holy, let him be sanctified still ' (Apoc. xxii. 11). Another reason for this effort is that if we fail to engage in it, our imperfections will gain ground, and put us at a serious disadvantage. We know that if we do not remove the weeds from our land they will multiply and overrun it, so as to obstruct the growth of the crops and lessen the yield. Similar is the result when religious are content to remain in their imperfect way of life ; they show disregard of their highest interests, since their imperfections will obtain firmer root and spread, much merit will be lost, and less fruit will be gained. On the other hand, religious who strive to remove their imperfections will be rewarded by daily conquests and by a rich harvest of merit, and the effort to do so will prove a most efficacious help to them against falling into venial sin.

Let it, then, be our desire and resolve to do in this matter what will be most pleasing to God and what will prove so beneficial to ourselves, and let us not deem the undertaking too arduous, for God's grace will smoothen the way. It is not expected of us that we shall be free from human frailties, but only that we shall struggle to overcome them. What steps should we take to do this ?

In the first place, we should weigh the matter well, as we have now been doing, so as to incite in ourselves an earnest desire of correcting our shortcomings and imperfections ; we should sincerely desire to be more pleasing to God, and be resolved to cultivate piety and devotion, humility and charity

—for these are antidotes to our principal failings. Thus we shall prove that we are concerned to amend them. A spiritual writer says that if we sincerely wish to be free from every imperfection, there is no surer way to success than by directing our efforts to attaining the height of perfection.\*

In the second place, we should in such a manner avail ourselves of the daily and constant helps to perfection found in the religious life as to draw profit from them. The same means are open to all, but all do not derive the same benefit from them; some become rich in grace while others remain poor, and some advance in fervour while others remain tepid and negligent. The religious exercises should be performed with punctuality and exactness; and at our confessions, our meditations, and our examinations of conscience, there should be a careful scrutiny of our conduct, accompanied by self-accusation and sorrow. In Holy Communion we should pray earnestly for grace to advance in charity and in religious dutifulness, and to avoid our usual failings. We should, moreover, endeavour to sanctify and bear patiently our daily crosses, and we should offer them in atonement for our faults.

In the third place, we should so direct our steps towards advancement in virtue, piety, and religious observance as never to go back or even to rest on the way; but we should ever begin afresh, and seek ever to stimulate our efforts by suitable considerations. Such considerations would be the holy

\* ‘*Si cures ut nulla sit in te imperfectio, curabis ut sit maxima perfectio.*’—R. P. AVANCINI, ‘*Meditationes.*’

character of the service in which we are engaged, the lessons of our Lord's words and life, the debt of gratitude we owe God, the example of the Saints, the duty of repairing the past by fervour in the present, and, finally, the wisdom and utility of labouring earnestly for our sanctification. While you consider the happy result to yourselves of ever renewing yourselves in fervour and of stirring yourselves to fresh effort, you should not be unmindful of how useful in the Church religious will be who in this way strive to root out their imperfections and to become more perfect; for their conversation and example, and the efficacy of their prayers, will be such that they will prove of benefit to others for their conversion, their guidance, their spiritual welfare and salvation.

In the fourth place, and lastly, we should ever look forward to the heavenly reward. No efficacious desire or effort to please God in any way will go without its recompense. If for His sake we strive to correct and overcome our imperfections, He will not only bless and reward our effort in this life, but He will bestow upon us a heavenly and everlasting reward in the life to come. It is written: 'He that loveth cleanness of heart, for the grace of his lips shall have the King for his friend' (Prov. xxii. 11). While it is yet the time of sowing, let us cast in our seeds by every effort to please God and to obtain the promised recompense, for according as we sow, so shall we reap. Let us imitate St. Paul, who, recognising that he was not yet perfect, strove ever to become so, hoping to attain to the heavenly

reward. 'Forgetting,' he said, 'the things that are behind, and stretching forth myself to those that are before, I press towards the mark, to the prize of the supernal vocation of God in Christ Jesus' (Phil. iii. 13, 14).

In conclusion, I exhort you to ponder on the importance of dealing with your imperfections in a manner not to allow of their taking deep root or growing in force. Recognise the benefit of striving to correct them, and be assured that this effort will bring satisfaction and peace to your soul. If you ever strive in this direction, you will not easily fall away from the path of God's devout servants into ways of remissness and spiritual danger, but special helps and blessings will be vouchsafed to you to maintain you in fervour, and mercy will pour out upon your contrite spirit its pardon and consolation. 'Blessed,' says David, 'are all they that fear the Lord, that walk in His ways; for thou shalt eat the labours of thy hands; blessed art thou, and it shall be well with thee' (Ps. cxxvii. 1, 2).

#### IV.

##### *LOVE OF OUR VOCATION.*

‘Behold, my Beloved speaketh to me : Arise, make haste . . . and come.’—CANT. ii. 10.

GOD spoke to your heart when, by a special decree of His goodness, He invited you and drew you to the religious life. He called you from the desert to the land of flowers, fruits, and sweet perfumes ; in other words, from the world in which there is so much of spiritual barrenness and blight to a state of holy living in which virtues and good works flourish. He demanded of you the consecration of your life to Himself ; you made it, and your offering was accepted as ‘an odour of sweetness in the sight of the Most High’ (Ecclus. xxxv. 8). Our Lord seemed to say to you : ‘Arise, make haste, and come.’ In whatever manner the call was made known to you, when you became aware of it, and realized what it signified, your heart was glad. You might have expressed your holy satisfaction in the language of the spouse : ‘Let Thy voice sound in my ears, for Thy voice is sweet’ (Cant. ii. 14). You then turned your thoughts from the joys and satisfactions of the world, and longed for the peace

of the religious house, for the habit, and for the veil.

Let your thoughts turn once more during this retreat to what your vocation is in itself, what it is to you, and what it demands of you, and renew your appreciation of God's goodness in deigning to call you in so special a manner to His service. By this vocation He marks out for you the demands of His will in your regard; they are seen in the character, spirit, duties, and scope of your vocation.

Its character may be described as not of the worldly order, but raised above it, as it is of the religious and spiritual order; for your vocation demands not only the faithful fulfilment of God's commandments, but also the observance of the evangelical counsels. The spirit of your vocation is one of devotedness to God's glory, to His Church, and to the welfare of your neighbour; also one of personal piety and of mutual charity. The duties of the religious state are laid down by the rule, and are imposed by obedience; they comprise union with God by recollection, meditation, prayer, and the holy sacraments, and the service of your neighbour in the various works undertaken by your religious institute. The scope of your vocation embraces all that its spirit of devotedness demands and suggests, but principally the usual practices of the religious life, and the performance of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.

We will reflect in this conference on the affection you ought to have for your privileged vocation and the happy results of such an affection, and we will



finally consider the necessity of guarding against counter-attractions. Your affection should be loyal and strong, as otherwise discontent and various infidelities would most probably creep in. The Divine Giver of the vocation says: 'Let us get up early to the vineyards, let us see if the vineyard flourish, if the flowers be ready to bring forth fruits' (Cant. vii. 12). Murmurings and infidelities are as the foxes that devastate the vines. It is written: 'Catch us the little foxes that destroy the vines, for our vineyard hath flourished' (Cant. ii. 15). May our Lord find in your vineyard the flowers and fruits which zeal for your vocation should yield!

To stimulate your affection for it, you should ever bear in mind that the call to the religious state is a special grace. Not all—indeed, but few—receive this mark of God's favour, and it will remain a mystery to you why God showed this regard for you. Inscrutable are His designs; our Lord says: 'The Spirit breatheth where He will, and thou hearest His voice, but thou knowest not whence He cometh and whither He goeth' (St. John iii. 8). When the call came, in what light did you regard the religious state? Later on, what were your thoughts about it during the fervour of your novitiate? May we not say that it rose before your eyes as a beautiful vision? It was as the house in which God dispenses His special favours to those whom He loves; it was as the beautiful garden walled-in from the world, and as the land of spiritual blessings and delights; it was as the abode in which God's friends, clad in a habit betokening their dedication to Him, dwell in peace,

fervour, and holiness ; and it was as the threshold of the kingdom of glory and the sure way into the realms of bliss. Why should the picture seem different now ? If it has changed in your eyes, it is you who have blurred it.

Call to mind with what dispositions you corresponded with your calling. Did you not feel profoundly sensible of the goodness of God in bestowing it upon you ? and did you not enter the novitiate willingly and joyfully, fearing only lest you might not be received, and, later on, lest you might not be admitted to your profession ? In those days you were fervent and happy. Should you not be more so now, seeing that now your aspirations have been realized, and that you are confirmed in your calling ?

In the early stages of your religious life, what was your appreciation of the kind of life to which you felt called—of its duties, and of the ends in view ? You admired everything ; you deemed the Book of Rules a compendium of wise advice, precept, and direction, given you by a loving Providence to guide you in the path of perfection ; and you desired to prepare yourselves earnestly and dutifully for a life of piety and usefulness. At that time you certainly loved your vocation ; do you love it less now ?

It is both wise and just that you should love your holy and privileged vocation, and that you should conform yourselves willingly with its obligations. This dutiful affection is the secret of the peace and happiness experienced by devout religious. Love of your vocation is like the mortar in a building ; the mortar binds the stones and bricks together, so

that the building may be firm, and may weather the storms that will spend their force against it. 'Many waters cannot quench charity' (Cant. viii. 7). If you have this dutiful affection, you will not be disturbed or discouraged when you feel that you are not understood or appreciated, when others disedify and pain you, when the murmurings of others reach you, when you fail to attain the success you desire, when your plans are foiled by sickness or other causes, when your labours are multiplied, when you meet with opposition, when others speak against you, or when you experience spiritual dryness; under all these trials you will be supported by grace, and you will be staunch and dutiful. Without this affection it is to be feared there would be no bond in your religious life.

It is indeed possible to conceive persons clad as religious, professing to be such, and held as such, yet having at the same time very little interest in their vocation, but a great deal of interest in what is outside of it, and some even manifesting more interest in secular persons than in their religious sisters. In others, again, who have lost the spirit of their calling, the direction of their energy would appear to be rather in secular matters or self-indulgence than in becoming good religious. How lamentable is this incongruity! Such religious might be termed 'unprofitable servants.' From the ranks of such as these come apostates from religious institutes. These religious are in many cases a cause of anxiety to their superiors, of scandal to their sisters in religion and often to seculars, and the

cause also to themselves of uneasiness and unrest. It may be said of them that their heart is not in the right place, since they do not love as they ought the life and state to which God has called them, and since they are not eager to comply with its obligations. Such a picture should be a warning against unfaithfulness to the spirit of your calling.

There are also other faulty religious, who keep up some show of religion, and are in most respects faithful to its duties, but who yet hanker after what is outside the scope of their vocation, or seek their satisfaction in worldly intimacies, and are desirous of the esteem and praise of seculars; or who wish to follow their own whims and fancies, or claim special treatment and exemptions that fervent religious would not dream of demanding. Such as these might be termed religious with 'divided affections.' Their life must necessarily be full of imperfections, and to some extent disedifying.

I have described two classes of religious, the second less faulty than the first. You should strive to avoid imitating either, since their affections are allowed a scope and a direction unworthy of fervent, dutiful religious, and their conduct will follow their affections. In other words, since they do not love their vocation as they should, much of their life will be unsatisfactory and unprofitable.

The voice of God seems to say to you: Love your vocation. If it were man who gave you this vocation, you might consider yourselves at liberty to follow it, or to disregard it; but since it comes to you from God, you must view it in a most serious

and reverent light. Seeing that it manifests not only His condescending love of you, all unworthy of this as you are, and also—what is important to note—His will in your regard, your vocation should therefore be sacred in your eyes, and be prized and loved by you. There was a time, as I have already said, when you did value it, and when you rejoiced in what it demanded of you; has this time passed away? Have you no longer a zeal for the observance of your rule, a desire to serve your neighbour, and a zest for prayer and for obedience? Has the spirit of self-denial and submission died in you, and have silence and recollection become irksome to you? If so, why? The answer is, because the love of your vocation has lessened, and it now stimulates with less force your spirit and energy.

What shall we now say of the happy results that should follow affection for your calling? You may gather from them the benefit of ever entertaining this desirable affection. The results are seen principally in the earnestness that will mark your conduct, in the meritoriousness of your life, and in the peace and contentedness of mind that you will experience.

It will be readily understood that if you love your vocation and all that it demands of you—its character, spirit, duties, and scope—your face will be ever averted from all sin and from everything that would be unworthy in your holy state of life, sin being opposed to the perfection you must ever tend to. This, however, would not be the only result; for, being devoted to the demands of your calling, you would also strive with all earnestness to fulfil your

vows joyfully and to keep your rules exactly. Your rules would be dear to you, and their usefulness would be fully recognised and sincerely appreciated by you. You would, therefore, strive to observe them faithfully, not as through any constraint, but willingly and with devotedness, and there would not be any insincerity or pretence about your religious observance. Both in spirit and in conduct you would be true religious. This would be the first happy result of loving your vocation.

In the second place, a fund of merit would be accumulated from this twofold character of your religious observance—fidelity and affection. All your rules would be kept as far as possible, and your obedience and observance would be willing, cheerful, and affectionate. It is written: ‘In every gift show a cheerful countenance’ (Ecclus. xxxv. 11). You would thus, as it were, offer to God the flower, not alone with all its petals and other parts, but also with its freshness, its colour, and its perfume. Many acts of self-denial, patience, humility, submission, and religious zeal are demanded in such observance, and there is a pervading spirit of faith and piety directing everything to God’s glory. You may not reflect on this, or keep count of these acts of virtue, but they are known to God, who will one day mete out the abundant reward. Where observance is under-rated and disregarded, this often proceeds from wrong ideas of its usefulness or obligation: a spirit of independence and listlessness dictates other conduct, which is frequently faulty and in which these acts of virtue have no place, and much merit is lost.



A religious who spends her life in faithful and affectionate observance of her rules, fulfilling in the same spirit the duties of her calling, will scarcely need canonizing at the close of her earthly career ; for the constant edification of her example will not only add to the inherent merit of her actions, but it will also, at her departure, claim for her the veneration of her Institute. She merits before both God and man.

The third result of a sincere love of your vocation will be the enjoyment of interior peace. A religious who holds her wayward spirit under control, and who keeps her aspirations and desires, her interest and affection, strictly and devotedly within the scope of her vocation, will be free from that uneasiness and unrest which results from such faults as ambition, intrigues, self-seeking, discontent, undue association with seculars, neglect of rule, and other such unreligious conduct. She may not expect to be spared crosses and trials, but she will for the most part avoid such faults of her own as would disturb her peace of mind. She will enjoy that calm and security which God promised His chosen people if only they 'walked in His precepts and kept His commandments'; 'I will give,' He said, 'peace in your coasts; you shall sleep, and there shall be none to make you afraid' (Lev. xxvi. 6). Her mind and heart will rest in God, to whose most holy and wise will she will be entirely devoted, and her soul will taste the promised delights of peace.

I need not dwell at greater length upon these advantages resulting from the love of your vocation.

Follow up the few thoughts I have suggested, that you may be more thoroughly convinced of them. Love makes all things easy; it will make the yoke of religion sweet, and the burden of your obligations light. The fervent and dutiful religious is bound to her vocation by a light golden chain, while the religious whose affections are not properly schooled, so as not to wander outside her vocation and not to be unfaithful in other respects, feels herself bound by a heavy iron chain. God has not called you to His service to fetter you with the iron chains of serfdom, but to adorn you with the golden chains worn by His children; not to deject you in sorrow and spiritual misery, but to raise you up in joy, hope, contentment, and all spiritual blessings. So live in dutifulness that these may be your happy portion.

We have now to consider that it is necessary for you to guard yourselves against counter-attractions. When you were about to enter the holy state of religion, you considered the nature, conditions, and circumstances of your calling, and, having duly weighed them, you did not promise yourselves a life of comfort, independence, or social enjoyment; no, you took up the cross, and, accepting a yoke of submission, you expected only such measure of spiritual consolation and earthly blessings as God might see good for you to enjoy. God helped you—even perhaps beyond your expectations—in embracing the state to which He called you, so that you afterwards wondered how you took the step so calmly, and why you found it so easy to enter into

the spirit and duties of your calling. Aided by His grace, you overcame all obstacles, so you might say with David: 'The right hand of the Lord hath exalted me; the right hand of the Lord hath wrought strength. . . . This is the Lord's doing, and it is wonderful in our eyes' (Ps. cxvii. 16, 23). You have, then, every reason to feel confident that, if you only strive to correspond with what your vocation demands, God's hand will not desert you, but will sustain you in fidelity to it even to the end of your life. If you fail in fidelity, it will be caused by your turning your thoughts to other objects and aims than those put before you in your holy vocation.

How detached from worldly and selfish aims and how devoted to your vocation you should be, you may learn from our Lord's replies to several men who wished to become His disciples. One of these men declared that he would follow Him whithersoever He went, upon which our Lord told him that He had not where to lay His head (St. Matt. viii. 20). One of the counter-attractions against which you should be on your guard is an undue love of bodily comforts. Our Lord insinuates that in pursuing your vocation you must be prepared to suffer, if not privations, at any rate inconveniences, but that you should not allow any such circumstance to lessen your love of it. You should even love it on that account all the more, since you thereby come to resemble our Lord closer in His manner of life. The more you are detached from material comforts, the less trammelled will be your

soul, and the more free will you be to devote yourselves to God's interests. You are called to imitate the Apostles, who were able to say to our Lord: 'Behold we have left all things, and have followed Thee' (St. Matt. xix. 27).

To another man, who also wished to follow our Lord, but who desired first to go and bury his father, our Lord said: 'Let the dead bury their dead, but go thou and preach the kingdom of God' (St. Luke ix. 60). Another of the counter-attractions you have to resist is an undue love of your relations. We are not aware of the particular circumstances of this man's case, but you will gather from our Lord's command that you should not permit any secular claim to prevent you from the accomplishment of any duty imposed upon you by God in the fulfilment of your calling. It may even happen that religious are prevented from assisting at the last rites performed over their departed parents. In such a trial and upon such an occasion they should recall our Lord's words, 'Let the dead bury their dead,' and remember, too, how St. Paul tells them to direct their solicitude to the things that belong to the Lord. Religious should not permit their affection for their relations to lead them to unfaithfulness to the obligations of their calling. 'The virgin,' St. Paul says, 'thinketh on the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit' (1 Cor. vii. 34).

To a third man who would follow our Lord, but who begged to be allowed first to go and take leave of his household, our Lord said: 'No man putting

his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God' (St. Luke ix. 62). Here you are reminded of another counter-attraction, namely, the world with its delusive pleasures; there is this on the one hand, and the religious state on the other. You have already made your choice; there must not be any looking back. Solomon declares of the world that 'all is vanity'; he said: 'I will go, and abound with delights and enjoy good things; and I saw that this also was vanity' (Eccles. ii. 1). Let not worldly thoughts occupy your mind, and do not think with any pleasure on the vanities of the world. Do not imitate the Israelites, who, after God had delivered them from the bondage of the Egyptians, sighed to enjoy again the flesh-pots of Egypt, the land of their captivity. To look back would be to run the risk of not persevering in your vocation. Do not look back from that standard of religious dutifulness to which God calls you, or from fervour to laxity, from zeal to indifference. God does not call you back, but ever urges you forward. Listen to the voice of the spouse: 'Arise, make haste, and come.'

Now, during the retreat, is the time to examine yourselves upon your love of your vocation. If you have halted on the way, if you are not as fervent as you used to be and as you should be, how do you account for it? Has your love of your vocation and its duties become less? As a consequence, has there been spiritual apathy and neglect? Has your attention been directed elsewhere? Have you fallen into certain faulty ways and not strenuously endeavoured

to amend? Or has discontent taken root in you? What so baneful as discontent? It destroys devotion and weakens dutifulness, and it is, moreover, contagious. When religious cease to love their vocation, greater evils follow; the way is paved for scandals and apostasy.

Love, then, your holy vocation; respect it, and make it respected; be faithful to its duties, its spirit, and its practices. If there has been any falling away, seek again the paths of dutifulness and fervour. It is written: 'Give glory to God with a good heart, and diminish not the first-fruits of thy hands' (Ecclus. xxxv. 10). Rather add to these fruits day by day. With love will come fidelity, effort, generosity, and perseverance. 'Love is strong as death' (Cant. viii. 6). While you love your vocation there shines on you the light of grace and spiritual joy, and you go forward in your strength; but when this love dies out, darkness sets in to obscure the beauty of the religious life, the merit of its practices, and the fulness of the heavenly reward. Be wise, and turn ever to the light; for it is written: 'God loveth none but him that dwelleth with wisdom; for she is more beautiful than the sun, and above all the order of the stars; being compared with the light, she is found before it. For after this cometh night, but no evil can overcome wisdom' (Wisdom. vii. 28-30).



## ● SECOND DAY.

### V.

#### *TEPIDITY.*

‘I would thou wert cold, or hot. But because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold, nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of My mouth.’—APOC. iii. 15, 16.

THESE words of our Lord’s message to the Bishop of Laodicea should convince us of the danger of spiritual tepidity. In that Bishop the malady was undoubtedly of a serious nature, as our Lord was prepared even to depart from him in disgust; but in all God’s servants it is, even when not so serious, an impediment to grace and a disorder attended by lamentable consequences. It is sometimes represented as a wasting away or even as a cancer that debilitates, lessens activity, and affects all the soul’s operations. This malady of the soul is met with in religion as well as outside it, and perhaps the number of tepid religious is not small. If this is so, it accounts not only for their own spiritual loss, but also for the inoperativeness of spiritual life in some communities.

Tepidity is the bane of fervent religious life, and is

an evil that can only be avoided and overcome by earnest piety and the frequent renewal of our good purposes. The tepid religious might describe her state in the language of David: 'My soul hath slumbered through heaviness' (Ps. cxviii. 28); but the grace of the retreat comes to awaken her, that she may seek the path of the fervent and return to an active life of dutifulness among the servants of her Lord.

We will reflect at some length upon the nature of tepidity and its disastrous effects, and we will then briefly note the tokens of its existence, and finally consider the remedies it calls for.

Some religious would seem to wish to establish a middle state between the state of sin and unfaithfulness, and that of virtue and fervour. Although their conduct is not sufficiently dutiful to entitle them to be considered good religious, it is not so faulty as to bring them under the category of bad religious. To them might be addressed the question of the prophet: 'How long do you halt between two sides?' (3 Kings xviii. 21). They seem to have one foot on the narrow way that leads to life, and the other on the broad way that leads to destruction. How unsatisfactory is their conduct! Let me portray for you some of its phases.

Their dislikes or vindictiveness are not so grievous as to extinguish charity, yet their suspicions are often uncharitable and unworthy, their judgments rash and unkind, and their resentment keen and prolonged. They regard as an odious crime the calumny that destroys a neighbour's reputation, yet their tongue is

so unsparing and inconsiderate that it might be termed, in the language of St. James, 'a world of iniquity' (iii. 6). They would not like to neglect the reception of the holy sacraments, but they often approach them because others do so, or they receive them in a routinal manner, without serious desire of reaping for their souls fruits of grace from them, after but little preparation. They avoid flagrant offences against humility, obedience, modesty, patience, and other virtues, and against their religious obligations, but there are constant faults of one kind or another, and unscrupulous breaches of the rule, without any real effort to amend. Perhaps they even make little of these faults, and say to themselves that there are many religious worse than themselves, and that they do not, after all, fall into mortal sin. They seem to be unmindful that every member of the community has a right to edification from their example, and that they are perhaps the cause of others becoming less observant, less pious, and less dutiful.

These religious have fallen into a state of tepidity, and it is with such tepidity as theirs that we have now to deal in this conference. Let us ask what view we should take of tepidity in presence of certain grave commandments of God and of various passages of the Holy Scriptures.

What shall we say of tepidity when we consider that God demands that we should strive after holiness? It is true that the tepid have not lost the grace of God, but their soul is languishing, and spiritual effort is weak. The precept is given more

than once: 'I am the Lord your God: be holy because I am holy' (Lev. xi. 44; xix. 2; xx. 7, 26), and our Lord's words to His followers are: 'Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect' (St. Matt. v. 48). These Divine words convey to us the will of God that we should ever strive after greater holiness. It is not for us to set bounds to our efforts, or to say that we are already as perfect as we need be; for the spirit of the Gospel and the express words of our Saviour teach us that we should even put before us the Divine perfections as our pattern and guide. This consideration should weigh especially with religious who are bound ever to tend to perfection. It should, however, be noted that to strive after perfection so as to wish to attain to perfect charity, which, according to St. Paul, is 'the bond of perfection' (Col. iii. 14), is not a duty reserved only for those called, as you happily are, to religious perfection, but is one that our Lord imposes upon all His followers. Tepid religious, however, would seem by their conduct to regard this duty as a work of supererogation; for, so long as they are able to avoid the fatal disaster of committing mortal sin, they manifest little or no zeal for pursuing the path that leads to holiness.

Another precept of the Christian life is penance. The Gospel demands that we should do penance, that we should deny ourselves, and that we should take up our cross daily. If there is one thing more than another that tepid religious dislike and often disregard it is mortification—the mortification of self-restraint, suffering, correction, and the constraint

of religious discipline. Although they cannot but acknowledge that these are necessary antidotes to the disorders of our fallen and wayward nature, they do not wish to use these remedies; yet St. Paul says: 'They that are Christ's have crucified their flesh, with the vices and concupiscences' (Gal. v. 24). Tepid religious do not relish this kind of crucifixion, and they strive to shirk every inconvenience. They must therefore be held wanting in the spirit and practice of Christian self-denial, and it is likely that they will not be faithful in observing the penitential enactments of their rule.

We are still considering the view we should take of tepidity in presence of the requirements of the law, so let us ask how the tepid religious understands and obeys the greatest and the first commandment, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength' (Deut. vi. 5). Does she not by her conduct, if not by her words, manifest that she does not accept the full meaning of this precept? She may, indeed, be willing in graver matters to obey the commandments, but the lesser points of the law are disregarded with little or no scruple, and she makes but little account of the opportunities of grace or of laying up merit. She cannot, therefore, be deemed whole-hearted in her love of God, and there are many indications of self-love and self-indulgence in her conduct.

If we contrast the life of the tepid religious with what is demanded by many passages of the Holy Scriptures, we find further proof of how displeasing it cannot but be to God. As we have already dealt

with several of these passages, we will now consider only the one I have selected as the text for this conference, 'I would thou wert cold, or hot; but because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold, nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of My mouth.' God loves the warmth of spiritual fervour in a soul—'I love them that love Me' (Prov. viii. 17)—He expects it, He deserves it; but when, notwithstanding His supreme claims, He meets only with tepidity and indifference, He turns away in disgust. When He addresses Himself even to a soul in mortal sin, there seems some hope. In such a case He uses at one time severe threats, at another words of comfort and reassurance—the sinner turns to listen, and is converted; but it would appear useless to deal in this way with the tepid. Consider how a prince acts with a subject who, in a fatal moment, rebels against him: he strives to win him back to allegiance, for this subject may yet do him good service; but when the prince sees a slothful and remiss subject whose service is apathetic, he pays no regard to him, since he entertains no hope of gaining anything by either threats or promises. Our Lord sent word to the tepid Bishop of Laodicea, saying: 'I will begin to vomit thee out of My mouth.' How expressive this is of the displeasure which tepidity causes to God! Religious who have fallen into remiss ways, and those who pursue their vocation without zeal or devotedness, would do well to weigh the meaning of this message, and to seek without delay to return to the path of fervour, if they would save themselves from a like rejection.



We have now, in the second place, to consider the disastrous effects of tepidity. Let us view but two effects—two that are so closely allied as to deserve to be looked upon as only one ; these are the subtraction of grace and a spiritual paralysis leading to spiritual death.

By a very forcible parable our Lord teaches us the various dispensations of God in the case of those of His servants who turn their talents to good account and in the case of those who fail to do this, and He goes on to say : ‘ To everyone that hath shall be given, and he shall abound ; but from him that hath not, that also which he seemeth to have shall be taken away ’ (St. Matt. xxv. 29). It is not pretended that the tepid religious altogether buries all her talents, but how many special lights and gracious inspirations she neglects, how little fruit results from all the graces and helps that she receives, how many occasions of doing good she lets pass unheeded, and how many religious observances she makes little of and disregards ! In consequence of all this neglect she cannot but be dissatisfied with herself, yet she manifests but little, if any, remorse, and she makes no serious effort to change her conduct. In such a condition as is hers there would be hope if only she turned in fervent prayer to God, if only she sacrificed her ease and imposed upon herself some restraint, if only she strove to display some generosity and zeal ; but no, she remains as she is ; she makes no effort to escape from the unsatisfactory groove in which her life is cast. Under such sad circumstances, should she not fear to hear from our Lord

the sentence : ' That which she seemeth to have shall be taken away ' ? or that other : ' I will begin to vomit thee out of My mouth ' ? Our Lord will no longer continue to lavish His graces upon her, and will begin to treat her with the disregard she merits.

The soul of the tepid religious will suffer not only the withdrawal of grace or the denial of special graces, but it will also experience the effects of a spiritual lethargy that will even expose it to spiritual death. The condition of lethargy is all the more to be feared because it may come upon the soul almost unnoticed. A hidden disease is more to be dreaded than one that manifests itself and draws attention. The tepid religious may say : ' I am alive ; I still have the grace of God ; I have not sinned grievously . ' This may indeed be so, but she is paralysed. How far is she from spiritual death ? As she receives now only ordinary graces, and as her correspondence with them is so unsatisfactory, she may be gradually descending the inclined plane that leads to the precipice and death.

Does the tepid religious forget that she has to contend in herself with the various weaknesses of fallen nature, whose demands upon her compliance are ever recurring, and are therefore a constant source of danger ? What light and strength from the Holy Spirit, and what a firm spiritual sense she needs in order to combat them with success, and thus turn their assaults to her own advantage ! Perhaps the tepid religious, as though confiding in her own judgment or strength, strives to make some compromise with these insatiable foes, deter-

mining only not to allow them to carry her too far ; but all the while she is at the brink of the precipice, and she may easily fall.

Consider such conduct on her part in the case of dangerous thoughts or affections, of worldly esteem, of self-indulgence, or of certain enmities or dislikes. We know what pious souls would do—how they would be staunch in contending with the danger and be earnest in prayer, and how, after much anxious struggling, they would have the consolation of securing the victory for virtue and duty. But what if a loose kind of warfare, such as we have described, be maintained? Will the tepid religious be sure of victory, and for how long? May there not arise uncertainties, misgivings, and doubts as to the line having been passed and mortal sin having been committed? Such sad examples as those of Saul, David, Solomon, and Judas should stand before her in warning. What happened in their case? Their great falls followed lesser ones—the great fall came at last. So may it be with the tepid religious. What is said in the Book of Proverbs of the bodily sluggard may be applied to her in a spiritual sense: ‘How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? Thou wilt sleep a little: thou wilt slumber a little . . . and want shall come upon thee as a traveller, and poverty as a man armed’ (Prov. vi. 9-11). The tepid religious will cease to watch and pray, and she will become lax in her devotions, in walking in God’s presence, in studying discretion, in practising self-restraint and the mortification of the senses. Then will Satan avail himself of his

opportunity to attack and overcome her, now in one way, now in another, and she will come at last to a condition which may be described as one of spiritual destitution.

We have spoken of tepidity as a kind of paralysis ; it may also be compared to one of those forms of wasting sickness that gradually weaken the constitution and finally cause death, and against which there seems to be no effectual remedy. Men may rally when assailed by a more virulent malady, but under such sicknesses they linger for a long time and finally succumb. When a man, otherwise a good Christian, is by some inscrutable design of God permitted to fall into mortal sin, he becomes inconsolable until he has repented. Upon his conversion he redoubles his fervour, and he takes steps to avoid a repetition of his fall. What, however, is the case with a tepid religious ? Does she not, after much infidelity and many venial sins, at length fall, and how is she then affected ? Do these words of our Lord's message apply to her : 'Thou hast the name of being alive, and thou art dead' ? Or is she now of the number of those who are spiritually dead, and who have ceased to give praise to their Maker ? 'The dead shall not praise Thee, O Lord' (Ps. cxiii. 17). There would be some hope if only she was sensible of her sad condition, as was the publican ; then would she cry out, 'O God, be merciful to me a sinner' (St. Luke xviii. 13), and mercy would wait upon her to justify her. No ; she thanks God that she is not a bad religious, that she is a favourite with many persons, and that she is not scrupulous or

weak-minded, and does not push her piety to extremes. But what? Is there not another aspect of her case that should be well examined and weighed? It is this: she will most probably suffer from misconceptions and delusions that may prove fatal to her; for what do we find? She has discarded mental prayer. She had at one time of her religious life an enlightened and delicate conscience; but now it is darkened and blunted, and, consequently, the malice of sin no longer alarms her as formerly. She even receives Holy Communion, not only without becoming preparation, but, at times, with an uneasy conscience. As to charity, it is evident that in its true sense it is weakened, if not actually extinct. How far, then, is the soul of this tepid religious removed from spiritual death? With this picture of her condition before us, we should be vividly impressed with the gravity of tepidity viewed in its results.

We now come, in the third place, to consider briefly the signs and tokens of this spiritual malady. What, let me again ask, do we find in the conduct of a tepid religious? She is no longer inspired with zeal for piety and observance, and she seems to have lost sight of her obligation to tend to perfection. Her devotion to the Blessed Sacrament has fallen off, and she has abandoned many of her practices of piety. Spiritual reading has now no attraction for her, and prayer and silence have become tedious. There is no earnest effort in her self-examinations and no serious attempt at amendment, and although her spiritual condition is a languishing one, it does

not seem to alarm her. She has, as already said, discarded mental prayer, thus depriving herself of much light and of daily incitement to fervour. David says: 'Behold they that go far from Thee shall perish' (Ps. lxxii. 27); may not this sad result follow in her case? What, by way of contrast, do we learn in the Psalms of David's conduct? 'O Lord,' he says, 'in the morning Thou shalt hear my voice; in the morning I will stand before Thee and will see' (Ps. v. 4, 5). He declares by these words the necessity he felt himself under of addressing himself to God. Elsewhere he says: 'In my meditation a fire shall flame out' (Ps. xxxviii. 4), for in prayer and through prayer he gained fervour and energy. Furthermore, this tepid religious no longer obeys willingly, and besides not having sympathy with the superiors, she will show herself wanting in that *esprit de corps* which makes community life happy and real. Of what, I ask, do all these voids and omissions, failings and undutifulness, give token, if not of the tepidity and apathy of her soul? I would address myself in fervid appeal to any religious in whose manner of life these tokens are seen, and say: O chosen servant of God, spouse of Christ, is this the service, is this the love, demanded of you? Will you not arise? Know 'that it is now the hour for us to rise from sleep' (Rom. xiii. 11).

Let us now, in the last place, briefly consider what remedies should be applied for the cure of so sad a disorder. Although the conversion of the tepid is difficult—and perhaps even seldom perfectly accom-



plished—it may yet, by God's grace, be brought about. Signal graces are accorded during the time of retreat; during that time, therefore, the tepid should pray earnestly, and seek the path of fervour which will render them pleasing to God, and which will bring true peace and satisfaction to their own heart.

During the time of retreat the tepid perceive the languor of their soul. They are moved by the subjects brought forward for their consideration, by the clear statement of what is required of them, by the goodness and long-suffering of God, and by supernatural motives of love and of fear, to enter into themselves with a view to amendment; they desire to arise and to escape the judgments of God. What steps must they take?

They must be moved by sincere conviction, and they should therefore meditate upon the goodness, love, justice, and mercy of God, upon His claim to their fervent and continual service, and upon how this claim should be met. There will be faults to correct, omissions to supply, and efforts to be made.

Having by these meditations sought light for their conscience, they must follow its guidance. They must strive to remedy their faults by conduct of an opposite character—remissness by exactitude, pride by humility, negligence by dutifulness, and dissipation by piety. Their efforts will not be successful if they do not avoid waste of time, and if they do not adopt a rule of life in conformity with their obligations. Finally, they must have confidence in

God's help, and this will lead them to pray earnestly for the graces they need to enable them to rise from their tepidity and return to dutifulness and fervour.

Let us view tepidity in the light of our Lord's words to the Bishop of Laodicea, 'I would thou wert cold, or hot,' and in the light of what we have been considering. The tepid religious cannot expect to render God acceptable and meritorious service, or to receive from Him special favours. Will she continue in a condition that impedes her in the way to religious perfection, and that affords her no satisfaction? The day has come to arise and amend. Let her seek the path of fervour, and say with the prophet: 'The Lord God is my strength, and He will make my feet like the feet of harts' (Hab. iii. 19). There is much of the path to be repaired, and she has to prepare for the future. Fervour, as golden charity, will cover the shortcomings of the past, and will make sure the future. It will beget generosity, and she will not count the cost or be deterred by it. Peace will gladden her heart and conscience once more; and even if difficulties and contradictions occur, she will remember St. Paul's consoling assurance, that 'that which is at present momentary and light of our tribulation worketh for us above measure exceedingly an eternal weight of glory' (2 Cor. iv. 17).

## VI.

### *HOLY POVERTY.*

‘Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God.’  
—ST. LUKE vi. 20.

OUR Lord has made the treasures of His followers to consist, not in material wealth and earthly riches, but in what is spiritual and heavenly—in grace and virtue, in liberty of soul and holiness of life. When He calls them to a more perfect way of life, they must despise worldly possessions, and embrace poverty; they must depart from the common path of ordinary men, and embrace chastity; and, finally, they must even give up their own will, and embrace obedience. As religious you must enter into our Lord’s mind, and view perfection with His eyes. He makes known to you, by His teaching and example, what you are to understand by perfection, what it demands, and how you are to seek it. He is the first Master of the religious life. Holy Founders of religious Institutes have striven to imbibe His Spirit as well as to learn His doctrine.

As to holy poverty, which is the subject of this conference, they teach that it is the foundation of all perfection, the unassailable bulwark of the re-

ligious state, and the virtue most conducive to other virtues, opening the way to every kind of good work. Strive, then, to regard it in this light, for the more sincere and enlightened is your appreciation of it, the more loyal will you be in practising it; and the more exact you are in observing what is required by religious poverty, the more fully will you experience the inestimable benefits that proceed from it.

If holy poverty is really what it is represented to be, it must not be a sinecure. Like other virtues, it must hold sway in the heart, produce its own impression on the character, and manifest itself in the exterior conduct. There is a very special reason why you should understand, value, and practise poverty—namely, that you have bound yourselves to its practice by a vow. A vow imposes a serious obligation. The vow to live poor constitutes you in a state or lasting condition of poverty, which you embrace for the term stipulated by your vow. This may be for life, or for a certain number of years; but in the latter case it is intended that when these years lapse your vow will be renewed, and that these renewals will embrace the whole term of your life. It would be not only dishonourable, but also sinful, and even sacrilegiously so, to be unfaithful to your vow.

The importance of holy poverty may be judged by its bearing upon religious perfection. The renunciation which our Lord would impose upon the young man of great possessions is the same that is demanded of religious; they must part with everything and follow Christ, and the end in view is

the same. The young man declared that he had faithfully obeyed the commandments, and he asked if anything more was required of him. Our Lord invited him to proceed a step further; yet higher and wider fields were before him—there was the path of perfection. What was the first requirement towards this exalted goal? Our Lord said to him: ‘If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow Me’ (St. Matt. xix. 21). These words teach us the relation that holy poverty has to religious perfection. The love of material riches is opposed to spiritual advancement, but detachment from them is favourable to the workings of grace.

You may learn a lesson from what is seen in the world. When men set their heart upon riches, to accumulate them and to enjoy them, it is sad to see in how many cases they neglect the service of God and the practice of the Christian virtues. They love what is earthly and material to the detriment of their spiritual and everlasting interests, and this proves that riches are as a rule an obstacle to perfection. Our Lord therefore said to His disciples: ‘Amen I say to you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.’ How often the possession of wealth leads to pride, love of pomp, luxury, worldly ambition, and irreligion! Consider the result of the love and desire of riches in the case of Nabuchodonosor, whom it led to pride and to God’s chastisement; in the case of Dives, whom it led to luxury and the punishment of hell; and in the case

of Judas, whom it led to a perfidious betrayal of our Saviour and to everlasting perdition. Thank God, then, that by a special and loving dispensation you have been called to embrace the state of evangelical poverty, in which you may hope to tend ever to perfection, and to experience the blessing attached to the practice of poverty, for our Lord has said : 'Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.'

Let me now bring under your consideration the obligations you have contracted by the vow of poverty. You have by your vow given up, under the conditions laid down in your Rules, the rights of proprietorship, despoiling yourselves, as far as you are personally concerned, of all worldly goods. The vow does not affect your right to live, your claim to your good name, or what belongs to the spiritual and supernatural order, but it deals with everything, great or small, which has a money value. Under the vow, therefore, come money and property, houses, land and stock, articles of dietary, clothing and furniture, books, scientific instruments, objects of art, and whatever might be termed 'worldly goods' having a money equivalent. The arbitrary use of any of these things, independently of the superior, is forbidden by the vow. Although a religious may by her rule be permitted to retain what is termed the radical or direct ownership of whatever property she may have inherited or become otherwise personally possessed of, and although she may therefore be permitted to will it, and even with proper authorization to dispose of it, during her lifetime, she is yet



by her vow not allowed to enjoy personally and individually the use and benefit of it; nor is she permitted to deal with it as proprietress independently of the will and permission of her superior, according to the provisions of her rule. It thus comes that, in exercising her radical rights as owner of property, she is not personally richer, nor does she enjoy the various advantages attached to riches; she respects the essential practical obligation of her vow, and no distinction is thereby created in her community.

The chief practical obligation of your vow of poverty is, then, that of not using money or whatever may have a money value—not necessarily a considerable value, but any money value—independently of the will of your superior. This is the practice of poverty that unfetters the spirit; this is the detachment from riches that helps the soul to seek and relish spiritual goods, and that tends to further the work of your religious perfection.

Religious require the leave of their legitimate superior in dealing with what comes under the vow of poverty, in order to save themselves from a breach of their vow. With her leave, if in keeping with the rule, they may receive, retain or give, buy or sell, spend and use, borrow or lend, or otherwise dispose of goods; and then their vow will not be violated.

Religious may not, however, always have their superior at hand, or she may not wish them to refer every matter to her; we may therefore ask if it is always and in every case necessary to obtain her express permission. Not dealing with particular cases,

the general reply to this question is that it is not necessary, but religious should yet seek express permission when they can conveniently do so. When, however, this express leave has not been obtained, and when it cannot at the time be obtained, religious must consider if there exists tacit permission for what they require, or if they may lawfully presume their superior's permission. From what has been said it will be seen that, speaking in a general way, religious, in spending money, in receiving or giving, and in using, retaining, or disposing of things, save themselves from a breach of the vow of poverty if they have, according to circumstances, the express, tacit, or presumed leave of their superior or of others vested with her authority.

Permission is tacit when, for instance, the superior knows that a religious is acting in some matter where poverty is concerned, and in which her leave is ordinarily necessary, and she sanctions it, not by express permission, but by silently allowing it—the subject being at the same time aware that the superior is cognizant of her act. There is, in such a case, tacit permission, inasmuch as, though the superior could easily forbid the religious, or disapprove of her act, she yet remains silent, and her silence is held to give consent. Where there is legitimate custom in a matter under the vow of poverty, as in lending various articles in daily use, or in giving objects of piety of trifling value, it may be held to have silent or tacit authorization. It has therefore to be recognized that, when there is no attempt at concealment or disregard of proper authority, there are occasions

when silence on the part of the superior may be taken as betokening consent.

Permission may under certain circumstances be presumed, but religious should be careful not to presume permission without sufficient warrant. If the superior cannot at the time be conveniently reached, and what has to be done cannot be deferred, then—if they have good reason for believing that their superior would sanction their act—religious may do it with a safe conscience, and they will not be guilty of any breach of their vow, particularly if the matter is not of any importance.

When a religious could conveniently see the superior, there would be no breach of the vow, but only of the rule, if she failed to obtain her permission, provided that she had sufficient reason for believing that the superior would willingly give the permission if asked. There would be no fault if she also believed that probably the superior would, under the particular circumstances, be satisfied at not being asked. This might be the case in matters of little moment, but it would be better even then and always—as well to safeguard the vow as to follow what is usually done—if a religious sought the superior's permission. Religious should be careful not to act without leave, for the reason that they do not wish to trouble the superior.

You would do well to impress these elementary principles relating to holy poverty upon your mind, in order that you may act faithfully up to them, and thus render your observance of the vow exact, loyal, and meritorious. Ever remember that God, by a

special favour of His grace, has called you into religion to love and practise poverty; be not, therefore, among those who do not wish to feel the effects of poverty,\* or who would wish to shirk the obligations they have contracted by their vow. What should be thought of religious who become petulant and difficult to manage when they are not able to obtain everything they want, and of others who cannot bring themselves to ask their superior for what they need? In what light should we view the conduct of those who, without permission, receive various commodities, and who keep for themselves what should be shared with the community, and of others who are over-exacting in their demands, dissatisfied with what is rightly provided, and ever eager for special indulgence on the part of their superior? Are not some religious too fastidious, and do they not manifest too much regard for appearances, while others have no scruple about causing unnecessary expense? Do superiors sometimes fail against poverty by over-indulgence of particular members of the community who seem to be able to obtain all they want—often articles which others would ask for in vain? Superiors should regard themselves as trustees and administrators only of the goods of the community. They must not, in cases when their first superiors or their subjects could not reasonably be supposed to acquiesce, bestow these goods upon their personal friends or others, nor should they devote to the

\* 'A religious sins against his vow of poverty in having superfluities, even with leave of his superior.'—See 'Elements of Religious Life,' Father Humphrey, S. J., p. 133.

benefit of these persons what would be more properly and more justly used for the benefit of the community. They would thus seem to act rather as owners than as administrators of the goods of the community.\*

Receive as addressed to yourselves our Lord's words: 'If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.' He has Himself deigned to become your model in the love and practice of poverty. These words of His teach the lesson. Nowhere does He commend riches, but He warns men against the danger of them. The glory of a religious should not, then, be in having every kind of comfort, the best of diet and clothing, and a house in which nothing is wanting to make it equal to the dwellings of the rich; no, her glory should rather be in having as little as possible and everything as plain as possible—in having only as much as is compatible with necessary requirements, personal and domestic. By notably exceeding this condition religious offend more or less against the virtue of poverty; and when the excess is contrary to the prescriptions and provision of the rule, they offend against the vow, for they vow to practise poverty according to their rule. What would call for apology

\* 'The goods of the monastery are possessed for the benefit of its subjects, and not for the advantage of the superior' (p. 114). 'Superiors have not power to spend the goods of the monastery at their own free will' (p. 133, 'Elements of Religious Life'; see the same work, pp. 112-115, for various breaches of the vow).

or explanation should be, not the plainness or poverty of their houses, furnishing, and accommodation, but any excess in comfort and convenience in these respects. But whatever may be the condition of a community, the religious must practise poverty in the manner of using its goods; they must employ due diligence with becoming care and order, and not permit waste, loss, or destruction.

Since our Lord has called you to embrace the state of poverty according to your rule, and since this virtue is so necessary to religious perfection, never be ashamed of it, set proper value on it, and fulfil its obligations with exactitude and with affection. Thus will there be a reality in your profession of poverty.

The state of poverty has become ennobled by our Lord's choice of it. See how He loved it! Not only did He dispense with all luxuries and at times with ordinary conveniences, but He likewise descended to conditions of neediness. You have studied the lessons of His birth in the stable at Bethlehem, where, as the heavenly messenger told the shepherds, He was to be seen reposing in a manger (St. Luke ii. 12); He was there as an out-cast in a shelter provided for cattle. You have considered His hard lot during His exile in Egypt, and how humble and poor was the Holy House at Nazareth. During His missionary career He often spent the night in retired spots in the mountains, and He declared on one occasion that He had not where to lay His head. Although one of the disciples carried a purse to supply the needs of all, it held but



little, and was sometimes empty (St. Matt. xvii. 26). On Calvary He was despoiled of His very garments, and His death on the bed of the cross was His final tribute to a most perfect poverty. Then was He despised in His neediness, according to the prophecy : ' I am a worm, and no man, the reproach of men, and the outcast of the people. All they that saw Me have laughed Me to scorn : they have spoken with the lips, and wagged the head ' (Ps. xxi. 7, 8). For His sake love and practise poverty.

Mary, too, was poor, and loved poverty. If St. Paul was able to assert that his life was so spent in union with our Lord that Christ lived in him, the union of Mary with our Lord was not less intimate. The virtues of Jesus were reflected in Mary, and therefore was she animated with a love of poverty like His. For thirty years the life of the one was bound up with that of the other, and Mary shared the poverty of Jesus at Bethlehem, in Egypt, and at Nazareth. The same may also be said of St. Joseph, who provided for the wants of the Holy Family by the toil of his hands. Religious are called to practise poverty in union with Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, and live poor in imitation of them. How honourable it should appear to them to follow their example ! and how unworthy to set their heart upon riches and comforts, and to complain at every little want or deprivation !

Our Lord has said, ' Blessed are the poor in spirit ' (St. Matt. v. 3). What should you understand by the spirit of poverty ? You may be said to have this spirit if you are free from undue attach-

ment to this world's goods—to the things provided for your use; if you see yourselves deprived of them without being on that account depressed or deeply affected; if you are satisfied with whatever is provided for you; if you do not desire to have more than necessity demands; and if, even in the matter of what is necessary, you conform yourselves with whatever God's providence may arrange. Since the vow of poverty deals with exterior conduct, the spirit and virtue of poverty do not fall under it; it is therefore possible for a religious to sin against the virtue without any breach of her vow. The spirit of poverty is a sure protection for the vow, and by it you walk in imitation of the spirit of Christ and of the saints who loved poverty, and merit the promised reward, 'Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' We may describe it as the love of poverty for its own sake. The highest of merit belongs indeed to the vow, for by your vow you bind yourselves by a solemn engagement to the practice of poverty; but the spirit of poverty is undoubtedly the source of rich merit, and religious who are animated with it will not easily transgress against their vow.

You should be convinced that, since holy poverty has so close a relationship with your advancement in perfection, breaches of the vow and offences against the virtue are incompatible both with your strict obligations as religious, and with that fervour which you should manifest in pursuing your holy calling. Be persuaded, then, of the excellence of religious poverty and of the many blessings that follow in its train.

The love of this world's goods, as well as the possession of them, is an obstacle to religious perfection. Wealth has led to evils in the Church and to many troubles in religious communities, for it introduces jealousy, disunion, dissipation, and a spirit of worldliness. Disregard of poverty cannot but be injurious to individual religious; for when poverty is not loved and practised, religious are likely to become singular, affected, exacting, unspiritual, and self-indulgent. To be thus would be a veritable evil; but to be poor is no evil, but rather a condition of blessedness, according to our Lord's words: 'Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.'

Thank God, then, that you have been called to profess and practise holy poverty; and during the retreat examine yourselves upon your love of the virtue and your observance of your vow. Do not attach yourselves to material comforts; do not seek to possess superfluities; do not form habits that tend to a relaxation of the observance of poverty; do not treat as your own property what you have only the use of; do not demand privileges, but content yourselves with what is customary; for if you do these things there may easily be faults against your obligations in the matter of poverty, and you may come to attach yourselves to this passing life. When it comes to its appointed term, you may find your mind troubled, and feel the wrench harder. If, however, you are religiously poor, both in affection and practice, then will you be loved and blessed by our Lord, fervent in spirit, and ready to leave all

perishable goods. Then, too, may you look confidently forward to the promised reward. The more you are detached from earthly riches, the more surely will you attain to those that are spiritual, and in the life to come to those that are heavenly and everlasting. 'Thou shalt have treasure in heaven.'

## VII.

### DEATH.

‘It is appointed unto men once to die.’—HEB. ix. 27.

IF during the retreat you are to take thought for the future, so as to prepare yourselves to spend wisely and fervently your future life in this world, you should also during this time of special grace take any steps that may be necessary to secure for yourselves the crowning, inestimable blessing of a happy death. You are not of the number of those who fear even to think of death, or of those who wish ever to consider it far distant ; but you are mindful of St. Peter’s warning : ‘The end of all is at hand ; be prudent therefore, and watch in prayers’ (1 St. Pet. iv. 7). Even though you are now in your health and strength, and apparently in the midst of life, you know that death may be lurking near the door. The holy writer of the Book of Ecclesiasticus says : ‘In the day of good things be not unmindful of evils : and in the day of evils be not unmindful of good things’ (Ecclus. xi. 27) ; and then he speaks of death as the time of God’s awards, as though he would point out the special lesson it should teach us—namely, to see to our works that they may be of a

character to insure to us at death the happy reward God has in store for His servants. Now, therefore, must we avoid every danger, combat every temptation, and direct our steps in the path of duty; for now in the brightness of the day we must make provision for the night, and in the vigour of life make preparation for death.

We have read of kings who have abandoned royalty, and of wise men who have quitted the distractions of the city, to give themselves in retirement and recollection to the thought of death. St. Augustine calls it the great thought. During your retreat study what the thought of death has to teach you. We will now consider two salutary and practical lessons which this thought should impress upon you—namely, to detach yourselves from things created, and to watch over your works.

It is important to recognize the emptiness and nothingness of the carnal and earthly goods and pleasures that belong to this transitory life—a life that has been described as passing ‘as a shadow’ (1 Par. xxix. 15). It is also important to be convinced of the fatal and irreparable disaster to which the abuse of these goods and pleasures exposes men. Such conviction will teach you to despise them, and not to set your heart upon them. What, I ask, will more forcibly bring home to you a true view of the vanity of these passing and empty things than death? Death, as a convincing preacher, teaches you as a first lesson that all is vanity (Eccles. i. 14), and, as a second lesson, how foolish are the desires that this world’s goods give rise to, since through



them many souls are lost. St. Paul points out this sad result where he says: 'They that will become rich fall into temptation, and into the snare of the devil, and into many unprofitable and hurtful desires, which drown men into destruction and perdition' (1 Tim. vi. 9). The thought of death will save you from these delusive and dangerous pursuits.

Death, when you reflect upon it, tells you of the dissolution of nature, the tomb, corruption, dust, and eternity. Perhaps even the teachings of revelation impress the mind less quickly and less forcibly than does the thought of these things. These things convince the mind of the reality of death, and of the nothingness to man of the creatures he passes away from when he succumbs to it. To draw fruit from our considerations, let us now bring into the presence of death the pleasures, honours, riches, and renown which are the object of pursuit in the case of so many worldly men.

What, in the first place, is the incorruptible judgment of death upon the pleasures of the senses? Man having, at the fall, abandoned the Sovereign Good, has ever sought from creatures some miserable sensible pleasure. He uses creatures in one way or another so as to derive from them some satisfaction, even descending at times to such satisfactions as are base and carnal. They cannot, however, meet the desires of his heart, for God alone can satisfy these. How lamentable the case is when religious set their heart upon various pleasures derived from creatures, as when they are immortified, seeking ease and comfort, over-exacting in details of diet or attire,

objecting to restraint, and given to dissipation! They may be said to love inordinately the pleasures of life. What does death say to these religious? It seems to say: Why do you love this body that is but clay and corruption? See what it will become in the grave—how filthy and how infectious! Does it become a soul that is immortal to love the wretched body so much? Pause and reflect.

Man loves, in the second place, the honours and distinctions of the world. What, however, is his fallen condition? Drawn from dust, he becomes by sin even viler than the dust of his extraction. By the Fall he has been rendered so incapable of good as to be unable of himself to conceive a thought available towards his salvation. Yet, notwithstanding his miserable condition, he is to be seen displaying before his neighbour his gifts from God, taking glory to himself on their account as if they were altogether his own. In this way he makes an idol of himself to the injury of God, to whom alone is due the glory that proceeds from his gifts. To cure this wound of pride in man God Himself humbled Himself, taking the form of a servant (Phil. ii. 7), becoming in the sacred Passion as the outcast of men and as a very worm (Ps. xxi. 7); yet the wound is not healed—men still seek to make much of themselves. It may even be that religious are infected with this vice. Do they forget the lesson our Lord taught when He washed His disciples' feet? He would seem to say: Leave to kings and to the great ones of the world the exaltedness of sway and the pomp of dominion, but do you walk in imitation of Me; the Son of Man is not

come to be ministered unto, but to minister (St. Matt. xx. 28). Learn, then, in all humility to wait upon your neighbour with offices of kindness and charity. If, however, notwithstanding our Lord's teaching and example, religious still desire posts of honour, or are eager for distinction or sway, let death speak to them. The tombs of the great seem in mute language to say to them: Remember, man, that thou art but dust, and to dust thou shalt return.

If, in the third place, religious set their heart upon riches or earthly treasure, and upon the comforts enjoyed by the wealthy, what lesson does death teach them? Why will you love, it seems to say, what vitiates the good you do, and lessens the reward you hope for, for the sake of a gain you must leave behind when you leave this world? At death what will be yours will be six feet of earth for a resting-place; your house will be the tomb and your attire the shroud; what will riches then avail you? They will not purchase the salvation of your soul.

Of what use, lastly, will human glory be to men in presence of death, even if they have been kings, warriors, or statesmen? Lucifer set his heart upon greatness and fame, but what did this profit him? We read in *Isaias*: 'Thou saidst in thy heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will be like the Most High; but yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, into the depth of the pit' (*Isa. xiv. 13-15*). If only worldly renown has been a man's ambition, what comfort will he experience when death comes to remove him from the world? Does the desire of aggrandisement and renown corrupt the heart of any religious? They

have embraced a life of self-denial and retirement from the world ; their portion is the humiliations of Christ crucified, for whose sake they have left all things ; will they now love vanity and the esteem of creatures ? Do they wish their talents, or accomplishments, or success to be known and praised ? Have they failed to seek only to please God in their works ? Let them come face to face with death ; let them consider the ashes of men of renown and of those of whatever degree who sought this world's esteem. How little is made of them now ! ' Their memory,' says the Psalmist, ' hath perished with a noise ' (Ps. ix. 7) ; this is the most that happened to the great who have passed away. They were spoken of for a few days after their funeral, and then they were forgotten. A vain-glorious religious will meet with no better fate ; will she undermine her supernatural merit and lessen her effectiveness for good for the sake of such a reward as this ? How brief man's triumph is even at the best, and how quickly his fame vanishes ! ' Behold,' said David, ' Thou hast made my days measurable, and my substance is as nothing before Thee ' (Ps. xxxviii. 6). ' Time,' wrote St. Paul, ' is short . . . the fashion of this world passeth away ' (1 Cor. vii. 29, 31).

From these few considerations we are led to conclude that death should confirm us in our judgment upon the nothingness of this world's pleasures, distinctions, riches, and renown. We should also be convinced of the danger to our soul and to our salvation to which these things expose us, and the necessity, therefore, of detaching our heart from inordinate affection for them. If David cried out in his anguish,

‘The sorrows of death have compassed me, and the perils of hell have found me’ (Ps. cxiv. 3), how will it be with religious at the approach of death if the love of these things of earth has held sway in their heart? All is not over with us when we die. They will in spirit see the throne of the Judge set up in the heavens; they must appear at the tribunal of Infinite Justice. They will now have to account for the fulfilment of their duty to God and of the obligations of their calling. What will past pleasures, honours, riches, or fame avail them now? What if their attachment to these has made them unfaithful to what God demanded of them? They will now remember that it is written: ‘If any man will follow Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me’ (St. Mark viii. 34); ‘Love not the world, nor the things which are in the world; if any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him’ (1 St. John ii. 15); ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’ (St. Matt. v. 3); ‘Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall not enter into it’ (St. Mark x. 15). No thought of the world’s esteem can bring comfort to them now, and they despise the pleasures and distinctions that they once desired with displeasure to God. They see things in a different light now. Now they are distressed because of duties left unfulfilled, because of edification they failed to give, and even, perhaps, because of the scandal they caused. A clear light will now shine in upon their soul, showing what their calling demanded of them in detachment, self-sacrifice, piety, humility, and

charity, and how foolish they were in setting any value on the false glare of a passing renown. In the presence of death these religious will form a just judgment of all these matters, and they will wish that in all their works and conduct they had wisely weighed their bearing upon the future, and had not sought the passing satisfaction of the moment. They will recall the words of the holy writer : ' In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin ' (Ecclus. vii. 40), and they will regret that they did not reflect upon death in times of temptation and danger.

It is, then, evident that death teaches these religious lessons of true wisdom, while it forces them to acknowledge the emptiness of carnal and worldly goods and pleasures and the dangers to which they expose the soul. Happily, as religious we are further removed than ordinary Christians from such dangers. Let us, however, in the first place, learn the necessity of detaching our heart from inordinate love of things created, as these may become a serious obstacle to the spirit of our calling and to the work of our sanctification. We will not wait for death to come to teach us this lesson. Death teaches us to watch over our works : this is our second consideration.

Our life must not be misspent ; we have a work to do during it that must not be left undone. What should we say in the case of a criminal destined for the scaffold, to whom lay open a way of escape from his fate, or a means of appeasing justice, if he were to spend foolishly the time afforded him for these purposes so that he would then have no other course



left to him but to submit to the punishment of death? Now, men became by sin the children of wrath, condemned to everlasting death; the world is their place of exile and pilgrimage while they await the execution of their sentence. Our Lord, however, steps in as a Mediator and Saviour, and, suffering death in their behalf, He nails their sentence of condemnation to His cross, promises them eternal life, and makes over to them His own infinite merits. All that is demanded on men's part is that during this short and uncertain life they shall correspond with our Lord's grace, and thus co-operate with Him in His efforts to save them. What, then, should we say if men were to go on their way through life unheedingly, and to spend foolishly and to no purpose the time so mercifully given them for this end? Of what folly, rashness, and blindness we would deem them guilty! The criminal whose case we pictured to ourselves braves only the appointments of human justice, but men who misspend life brave the judgment of God, who can cast 'both soul and body into hell' (St. Matt. x. 28), and they bring upon themselves irreparable evils.

The moment of death will decide our eternity. Our present time is given us to prepare for it, so that we may escape everlasting death. What folly it would be on our part if we were to neglect so important a duty! Consider, too, that the hour of death is so uncertain; we should, therefore, be ever on the watch, ever prepared. Our Lord tells us that if we knew at what hour a thief would come, we would be prepared for him; but we know not at

what moment death's summons will reach us, so we must keep ourselves ever ready. 'Watch ye, therefore, because you know not the day nor the hour' (St. Matt. xxv. 13).

Let us take, as addressed to us, the words Isaias addressed to King Ezechias: 'Take order with thy house, for thou shalt die and not live' (Isa. xxxviii. 1). What, then, shall we do in preparation for the end which may be near? Let us not leave anything undone that ought to be done before we die. Have we any scandal to repair, any omission to make good, any neglected duty to fulfil, any misgiving to remove, any remorse of conscience to satisfy, any misunderstandings to rectify, or any unworthy conduct to alter and amend? If so, we should not delay in attending to these duties if we would hold ourselves ready for death. This is the practical lesson that the thought of death should impress upon us.

In human enterprises and commercial speculations careful provision is wisely made for every emergency, accident, or disappointment—in fact, for every possible contingency; and all this for some increase of fortune or fame. Prudent men, in carrying out their plans, leave little to chance. Provision, too, is made for the case of death; bonds are held to secure payment of debts or loans, and wills are made to apportion property justly and to prevent disputes. Are the children of this generation wiser than the children of light? History tells us how the powerful King Xerxes, viewing his numerous forces from an eminence, wept to think that after a few years not

a single man of all his army would be alive. What he said of many may with equal truth be said of the few. The years intervening between the present time and the death of the small number of religious who are making this retreat will be few. One by one, if not year by year, you will pass away. Now, with this certainty before you, and living in the continual uncertainty as to the time of your death, what provision are you making for eventualities? Have you foreseen every danger, risk, and contingency? Do you not recognize how great your folly would be if, by any neglect of repentance and amendment, you were to expose yourselves to the danger of being lost? Although, happily, you have not given rise to uneasiness or apprehension concerning your salvation, there may yet be some unworthiness in your conduct that ought to be corrected and provided against. Let death be your counsellor, and you will not delay taking action and applying the needed remedy.

If there is a continual uncertainty as to the time when death will overtake us, one thing is yet certain. Our Lord has given us one particular warning, namely, that death will come when we least expect it: 'At what hour you know not the Son of Man will come' (St. Matt. xxiv. 44). He has adduced as a warning the unpreparedness of the people in the days of Noe: 'They did eat and drink, they married wives and were given in marriage,' when suddenly the flood overtook them and destroyed them all; the unpreparedness of the people of Sodom when Lot went out to save himself: 'They did eat and drink,

they bought and sold, they planted and built,' when suddenly fire and brimstone rained upon them and destroyed them all (St. Luke xvii. 26-29); the unpreparedness of those Galileans who came with their victims, and whom Pilate seized upon and put to death, mingling their blood with that of their victims; and the unpreparedness of the eighteen men of Siloe upon whom the tower of their city fell (St. Luke xiii. 1-4). In view of such examples of unpreparedness, affording men such a warning, what, then, did our Lord say? 'Except,' He said, 'you do penance you shall all likewise perish.' He manifests the Divine mercifulness; for God does not wish us to be surprised by death, but to be prepared for it. He conceals from us the time of its coming, lest we should fall into the sin of neglect or presumption, but He exhorts us ever to watch and be ready, and He says: 'Blessed is that servant whom, when his lord shall come, he shall find so doing' (St. Matt. xxiv. 46).

In the Book of Proverbs we read how Wisdom said to the unwise: 'Forsake childishness, and live, and walk by the ways of prudence' (Prov. ix. 6). This was not the conduct of that rich man who said: 'What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? . . . This will I do; I will pull down my barns, and will build greater, and into them will I gather all things that are grown to me, and my goods; and I will say to my soul: Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thy rest, eat, drink, make good cheer' (St. Luke xii. 17-19). What unpreparedness for death! There was even no thought of it, but it was at hand; for

God said to him: 'Thou fool, this night do they require thy soul of thee.' And just as foolish shall we be if our preparation is no better than was his.

We are forewarned not only by our Lord's teaching, but also by our own experience. In how many ways men are reminded of death! They constantly hear or read of many deaths, they meet funeral processions, they lose their friends by death, they stand at the graves of the dead and see their tombs, and they assist at Masses of Requiem. All these incidents are so many voices speaking impressively to them and warning them: 'Be you also ready, because at what hour you know not the Son of Man will come' (St. Matt. xxiv. 44). Are we insensible to these voices and to this warning? When a sheep out of the flock is selected and carried off for slaughter, the rest of the flock continue to graze; let us not act thus without heeding when we are reminded of death, but let us reflect that we ourselves are already marked and doomed, and that we know not when we shall be carried off.

How difficult it is to get men to make their preparation for death! Even when they are on their deathbed, their only thought and wish is about their recovery. Draw near them, speak to them of their danger, and recommend them to receive the last sacraments—what do they say? They tell you they will soon be well again, or that it is yet too soon to think of receiving the sacraments, and they do not thank you for your warning, for they may even show displeasure. How pitiable to be found in such dispositions at such a time! This is not a fanciful

picture; perhaps every priest exercising the ministry has witnessed such a spectacle. Let us turn from it, and let us now go to the bedside of the dying religious who has made her life-long preparation. Death does not come to her as a surprise. She has loved God, prayed well, practised religious virtue, and loved justice and hated iniquity (Ps. xliv. 8); she has fulfilled the duties of her calling, and been patient under her trials and sorrows; she has found the yoke of discipline sweet, and the ways of piety comforting; and now she has reached the hour of her recompense. Holy Church, which she has edified by her life and labours, sends her minister to console and enrich her soul with the special favours bestowed at such a time upon her faithful children; and the Divine Lord whom she has loved and served, and to whom she has consecrated herself, metes out to her an abundance of graces. Peace reigns in her heart and conscience, and around her the supplications of fervent prayers ascend to heaven. Finally the summons comes, and the devout religious yields up her soul to God. She dies in holy sentiments, and even, it may be said, in the odour of sanctity; and her Sisters cherish her memory as one of the just who 'shall come forth unto the resurrection of life' (St. John v. 29). May the thought of death lead you to watch over your works and regulate your life in imitation of this wise and holy religious!

St. Paul says: 'It is appointed unto men once to die' (Heb. ix. 27). You have but one life to live, and one death to die. Death will at the appointed but unknown time remove you from among the



living: it will not delay, nor will it be gainsaid, or depart to come again; and when it comes, it will remove you absolutely and for ever from this life—death may therefore be termed an inevitable and absolute event. The thought of it should make you prepare for it by fidelity and fervour in the path of dutifulness and piety. There are supposed to be two preparations—the remote and the immediate; but in many cases there is but little if any time for the immediate preparation, and often it is scarcely what is desirable, owing to the difficult or painful nature of the fatal sickness that causes death. Be wise, and do not leave any way open for apprehension or deception; count rather on the remote preparation—that is, the preparation by a devout life. If you have not already begun to make this, you will begin it now during your retreat. You will depart from evil and do good, you will keep your heart from loving the world, you will strive as dutiful religious to sanctify your days in the way marked out for you by your Rule. This is all that is demanded. Thus will you be as servants waiting and watching, ready for the coming of their Lord; thus will you be as the five wise virgins having their lamps trimmed and supplied with oil, ready for the herald's cry: 'Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet Him' (St. Matt. xxv. 6). What joy was in store for them! for the parable says: 'The Bridegroom came, and they that were ready went in with Him to the marriage.'

## THIRD DAY.

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### VIII.

#### *TEMPTATIONS.*

‘Watch ye, and pray that ye enter not into temptation.’—  
ST. MATT. xxvi. 41.

WE are now on the stormy sea of life—it knows no permanent calm—we are exposed to the winds and waves, the shoals and rocks, the mists and darkness. Our Lord may come to us upon the waters, or He may seem to be asleep in the ship; but we shall yet be exposed to the tempests until we land on the eternal shore. Thither He beckons us, and there, in the harbour of everlasting repose and peace, we look for Him to welcome us. We read that the Apostles’ boat ‘in the midst of the sea was tossed with the waves, for the wind was contrary’ (St. Matt. xiv. 24). This picture represents our case in this world of temptations. They arise on every side: they are within, harassing the mind, imagination, heart, and will of men; they are without, proceeding from insidious words, delusive promises, vain display, dangerous spectacles, unlawful gains and pleasures, the snares of the wicked, bad literature, the sins of

others, and evil example. May grace, religion, wisdom, rectitude, piety, and virtue triumph in the midst of all these dangers and disorders. The servant of God might exclaim with David: 'My enemies have trodden on me all the day long, for they are many that make war against me'; but with David, too, he should add: 'In God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do against me' (Ps. lv. 3, 5).

And you, O servant of God, devout religious, look to yourself, for enemies are encamped on every side around you. Do not give them any advantage over you. Beware of sloth, dissipation, and human respect. Keep from you whatever would flatter vanity, weaken virtue, wound charity, undermine piety and observance, corrupt the mind and heart, breed discontent, or endanger your vocation. Be faithful to the service you owe to God and to the various obligations of your state of life, and, confiding in God's continual help, say with the Psalmist: 'If armies in camp should stand together against me, my heart shall not fear. . . . One thing I have asked of the Lord, this will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life' (Ps. xxvi. 3, 4). Your fidelity and your fervour will, however, be assailed by many temptations, therefore should you ever remember our Lord's exhortation to His disciples: 'Watch ye, and pray that ye enter not into temptation.'

When we study our Lord's own life, the temptation in the desert comes upon us as a surprise. How wonderful it seems that, having assumed

human nature and come to dwell among men, He should so far place Himself in the condition of men as to permit Satan to approach to tempt Him! Men also beset Him in the opposition and persecution to which He was subjected in His sacred Passion, as we find it written in prophecy: 'Many dogs have encompassed Me; the council of the malignant hath besieged Me' (Ps. xxi. 17). An explanation of this mysterious dispensation is this, that, since nothing is so common in our present existence as temptation, our Lord would become Himself our Model in combating it, and He would, moreover, teach us to submit patiently to this form of trial.

It is not to be supposed that it is only the wicked who are tempted, for the Holy Scriptures tell us that when men give themselves to the service of God, they must prepare their soul for temptation. Since religious have in a most special manner devoted themselves to this holy service, they may expect many assaults of temptation. We see how God's servants in every age have been tempted. How severe were the temptations experienced by Job, St. Anthony, St. Benedict, St. Francis, St. Catharine of Siena, and numberless other Saints! The devil assailed them, by God's permission, in many ways. The Apostles were not spared this form of trial; thus we read of the severe temptation suffered by St. Paul (2 Cor. xii. 7), although he had just been 'caught up into Paradise'; and Satan wished to sift St. Peter as wheat (St. Luke xxii. 31). These examples should reconcile us to temptation, and lead us to regard this life as a warfare. We are

ever beset by dangers, and we should therefore ever carry our armour and our weapons of defence.

The chief considerations in this conference will be the benefit to be derived from this kind of trial, the various sources of temptation, the remedies to be applied, and the faulty conduct that gives rise to danger.

All God's dealings with us are dispensations of goodness and mercy, and this ought to lead us to look for the good that lies hidden in our temptations. These are not sent to crush us, but to maintain us in a dutiful condition between over-confidence and dejection. Holy Job makes therefore this reflection: 'What is a man that Thou shouldst magnify him? or why dost Thou set Thy heart upon him? Thou visitest him early in the morning, and Thou provest him suddenly' (Job vii. 17, 18). And David says: 'Prove me, O Lord, and try me; burn my reins and my heart; for Thy mercy is before my eyes' (Ps. xxv. 2, 3). These servants of God did not fail, while expecting temptation, to proclaim His love and His mercy, and they evinced no spirit of alarm, but there is no trace of self-confidence in any of their utterances or in their conduct. It was far otherwise in the case of St. Peter when he so boldly declared that even though everyone else should be scandalized in our Lord, he would not be so, but who, when exposed to temptation, shamefully denied Him thrice. Temptation should prevent our over-confidence, for it teaches us our weakness.

Temptation also helps to preserve us in humility. This was evidently God's design in permitting, as

we have already seen, St. Paul to be tempted after he had been caught up into Paradise; for the Apostle tells us that Satan buffeted him 'lest the greatness of the revelations should exalt him.' How can men raise their head when they reflect upon the base, unworthy, and shameful temptations to which they are exposed? and when they further consider that, if they were left to themselves, they would fall a prey to them? How low they would fall, and how degraded they might become, if God did not extend His aid to them! When, therefore, temptation humbles us, let us rejoice in this benefit to our soul, and say with David: 'It is good for me that Thou hast humbled me' (Ps. cxviii. 71).

Temptations are permitted also to test virtue and to prove our fidelity. It must be seen if these are genuine; the rough shock of temptation tries them. We find it written of the just who have won their everlasting crowns: 'God hath tried them, and found them worthy of Himself; as gold in the furnace He hath proved them' (Wisd. iii. 5, 6). They were not rewarded until their dutifulness had been put to the test. The test is more severe in some cases than in others. We read, for instance, of a temptation experienced by a certain religious to return to the world. At night he would determine to leave on the morrow, but in the morning he would resolve to remain and to give yet one more day to our Lord's service. This harassing temptation continued for nine years, when it pleased God to relieve him from it ('Vit. Patr.,' Lib. V., Libello VII., n. 39). Even as the tempest shows if the tree has taken firm root



in the ground, so does temptation prove the reality and constancy of our virtue.

Another benefit of temptations is that they afford us an opportunity of exercising our spiritual arms, and of gaining merit. A condition of quiescence is not one of merit, but when various temptations arise we follow the wise prescriptions laid down for combating them; we watch our enemy, and guard ourselves against his assaults; we pray, and follow the dictates of faith; we fight valiantly, and do not desist until the enemy has been driven off. We repeat this conduct at every fresh temptation, and thus we gain experience, and accustom ourselves to meet our enemy with the tact proper to insure victory. Hereby, too, we lay up for ourselves much merit.

Finally, temptations are a benefit because of two lessons they teach us—namely, our own weakness, and where to expect assault. When we are under temptation we become aware of our own proclivity to succumb to it, and we feel the need we have to run to God for help. We are taught that, like the Apostles in the storm, we must cry out: ‘Lord, save us, we perish’ (St. Matt. viii. 25). We see no hope of victory except in the Divine assistance. Then, secondly, although our temptations may be many, we become aware of some that are particularly dangerous to us, and this knowledge, derived from the practical experience of these assaults, puts us on our guard against them. David said: ‘In this way wherein I walked, they have hidden a snare for me’ (Ps. cxli. 4); so are there snares prepared in our path, but we learn by our tempta-

tions where they are, and we are thus enabled to make provision against them.

These few considerations should convince us that God, who designs all things wisely, intends us to derive benefit from our temptations, and this ought to comfort and reassure us under this kind of trial. We will now examine from what sources our temptations arise, and it will appear that they proceed from the devil, from our neighbours, and from our own evil proclivities.

Temptations occur by God's permission, for He has designed and decreed that through them His servants shall be exercised, strengthened, proved, and perfected; therefore does the Psalmist say: 'Thou, O God, hast proved us; Thou hast tried us by fire, as silver is tried' (Ps. lxxv. 10). And St. Paul exhorts us, saying: 'Therefore take unto you the armour of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and to stand in all things perfect' (Eph. vi. 13). It must be deemed, then, that by Divine permission 'the creatures of God are turned to an abomination, and a temptation to the souls of men, and a snare to the feet of the unwise' (Wisd. xiv. 11).

Our temptations, in the first place, come from the devil, our arch-enemy. St. Paul speaks of the deceits of the devil against which we have to stand, and he says that our wrestling is against principalities and powers, and spirits of wickedness in the high places (Eph. vi. 12). St. Peter tells us that the devil goes about with all the evil intent of a roaring lion. This is the wicked enemy who led to the disaster of the

human race by his temptation in Eden. He is just as deceitful now as he was in the garden of Paradise ; he is ever awaiting his opportunity to make us unfaithful to God ; he uses many disguises, even, as St. Paul teaches, transforming himself into an angel of light (2 Cor. xi. 14). He never wearies in his efforts, pursuing us from infancy to our last hour, and no place, however sacred, is free from his assault, and he cunningly covers over the snare and the pitfall, hiding from our mind the unworthiness of the conduct to which he tempts us and the sad consequences of our fall. A bitter and unrelenting envy and enmity possess him, for he sees how grace has snatched from his grasp the souls that he deemed he had captured by the fall of man from original justice. His unceasing efforts are, therefore, directed to regain possession of them. Wonder not, O religious, if Satan's snares are laid for you in particular, for the more earnestly you pursue the path of virtue and piety, the more determinedly will the devil molest and assail you. You stir him up to greater fury because you despise him and his pomps, for you trample under foot the riches, honours, and pleasures of the world, and raise your mind and heart with constancy to God, and seek only His good pleasure. A spiritual writer says that when Satan beholds an accumulation of heavenly riches, a fervent and watchful mind, and industry in meritorious works, he becomes as a pirate, and endeavours to despoil the soul. He is, then, the author of most of your temptations. He has no regard for persons, and none are so holy or so innocent as to be spared. St. Luke writes :

‘And Satan entered into Judas, who was surnamed Iscariot, one of The Twelve’ (St. Luke xxii. 3). If he thus ensnared one of the Apostles, he will direct his efforts also against those who co-operate in the works of the apostolic mission.

Temptations come, in the second place, from our neighbour. When our neighbour’s conversation or conduct is disedifying, we are liable to suffer from it, for if we are not on our guard, it may be the occasion of our falling from grace, or from piety, and of our offending God in various ways. We may meet with persons who are sadly wanting in faith and piety, and who are imbued with a worldly and irreligious spirit; and, even in religion, there may be found some who have fallen from fervour, and who are faulty in matters of religious observance. Such as these often seem to strive to win others to adopt their views and to imitate their conduct. The danger is more pronounced when those who have been longer in religion attempt to patronize and contaminate younger religious. The pernicious writings of others have led many men into infidelity, and poisoned their mind with false ideas of morality. Beware, then, of those who would under-rate duty, observance, religious practices, and piety. Beware of friends and companions who are not edifying. Sometimes these, deeming that they have been slighted, become spiteful and resentful, and snares are laid that would cause a breach of charity and good feeling. Sometimes, too, we have to reckon among our neighbours some who have become our enemies and rivals; if so, these will try our patience

and charity. These considerations should convince us that many of our temptations come from our neighbour.

Temptations, lastly, arise from our own evil inclinations. St. James says: 'Let no man when he is tempted say that he is tempted by God; for God is not a tempter of evils, and He tempteth no man; but every man is tempted by his own concupiscence being drawn away and allured' (St. Jas. i. 13, 14). Our weaknesses are many, some being more grievous than others, and these, making their demand for gratification, become a source of many temptations. The seven vices prepare for the soul as many pitfalls. I will content myself in this matter with mentioning some of the temptations to which religious are liable. They may be tempted to neglect prayer and spiritual duties, to be weary of effort, to be disheartened, to disregard rule, to resent control, to love ease, to seek self-indulgence, to murmur and join in discontent, to be curious and immortified, to be impatient, angry, or vindictive (especially when thwarted), to be jealous and inconsiderate, to judge rashly, to be conceited and vain, to boast and make display of talent, to be selfish, and to insist on having their own way. These temptations are in a special degree dangerous because they arise from our own vices and weaknesses, which we are naturally inclined to gratify.

We come now to consider the remedies and precautions that should be employed in dealing with temptation.\* We must presuppose that our earnest

\* Much instructive matter may be found in Corn. a Lapide's *Commentary on Eccclus. ii. 1-6.*

desire is to overcome every kind of evil temptation, and to continue ever the true and faithful servants of God. If we are thus animated by a sincere love of God, we shall be resigned to endure temptation for His sake, and we shall be determined to adopt all necessary means of combating it.

The first preservative against falling when tempted is recourse to God, according to our Lord's admonition: 'Watch ye, and pray that ye enter not into temptation.' Prayer is a powerful weapon against every kind of evil; it brings God to our side, and is the link by which our soul is united to Him. We see how this is so when we consider that in prayer our mind and our affections are lifted up to God; it is a sacred act, springing from a supernatural source, and carrying the soul with supernatural force beyond the sphere and realm of nature to the throne of the Most High and to the very ear and heart of God. If our prayer is well made, although only an ejaculation, it brings aid and grace in due season from the Divine Source of all power and of all sanctity. By our prayer we prove our confidence in God, and we shall not be disappointed. David tells us how, when he was harassed by his enemies, his trust in God was rewarded. 'They surrounded me,' he says, 'like bees, and they burned like fire among thorns, and in the name of the Lord I was revenged on them; being pushed, I was overturned that I might fall, but the Lord supported me; the Lord is my strength and my praise, and He is become my salvation' (Ps. cxvii. 12-14). St. Francis Xavier in one of his letters says that nothing is so much to be dreaded under tempta-



tions as diffidence; earnest prayer overcomes and removes this, and inspires the mind and heart with confidence. We should therefore be faithful to our duty of frequent prayer, and in time of temptation we should at once have recourse to God in fervent ejaculatory prayers, begging Him for help and protection; and we should continue these prayers until we feel that the enemy has left us, being assured, as St. Peter says, that 'the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly from temptation' (2 St. Pet. ii. 9).

We should, in the second place, when temptation arises, turn aside to avoid it. This advice is of special importance when it is a question of any spectacle or of any conversation that might be the occasion of sin. In such cases it is better to remove ourselves from where we can see or hear than only to try not to take notice. That it is good, in some instances of temptation, to run away, we learn from the passage that says: 'Flee from sins as from the face of a serpent, for if thou comest near them, they will take hold of thee' (Ecclus. xxi. 2). If we stay near the danger, although we may have resisted at first, we may come to yield at last; for it is written: 'He that loveth danger shall perish in it' (Ecclus. iii. 27).

The third remedy against the power of temptation is to excite in ourselves a horror of sin. This should be the fruit of our various meditations, and of our frequent Confessions and Communions. Sin should be to us as a monster that would blight and destroy everything that is bright, beautiful, and enjoyable, and rob us of our treasures, and as a loathsome and

fatal disease that would attack our very life. Let us, then, upon its first appearance, dread it and shun it. This sense of horror will have two happy effects, namely, to guard us against curiosity concerning what is sinful or dangerous—this often opens the door to temptation—and to animate us to continual opposition when temptation comes upon us. You cannot be said to be inspired with a real horror of sin if you still proceed with your reading after you have a rightful misgiving about the matter, if you look again in a direction where there is danger, and if your curiosity leads you to continue listening when you are aware that you may hear what will be hurtful. Horror of sin should in such cases correct and overcome your curiosity. Nor can you pretend to a due horror of sin if, when under temptation, you relax your opposition and your efforts to overcome it; for in such a danger you should increase your resistance in the measure of the persistence of the temptation. Your horror should grow with the danger, and incite you to renewed effort. Victory will crown your struggle, for St. James says: ‘Resist the devil, and he will fly from you’ (St. Jas. iv. 7).

We should not, when assailed by temptation, be fretful or fearful, but resigned and courageous. We should be resigned and not fretful, because God knows how to turn whatever befalls us to our good. In permitting temptation, as He did in the case of His only-begotten Son, so also in the case of His adopted children, He acts with some wise and beneficent design as a father. In our case it may sometimes be to test our love, and at other times as a

chastisement for our correction ; or it may be to teach us our dependence on Him, and lead us to call upon Him to rescue, protect, and support us. Even when temptations are sent as a chastisement for our infidelity to grace, we should regard them as a remedy mercifully prescribed for our healing and welfare. We should be courageous and not fearful—but not presumptuous—because we should regard the cause of grace, truth, virtue, and perfection as the cause of God ; and if only we call upon Him we should manifest our full and constant trust in His power and will to help and protect us, otherwise it might be said to us in merited reproach as to the Apostles : ‘ Why are you fearful, O ye of little faith ? ’ It is recorded of a certain abbess that she suffered during thirteen years from very violent temptations, and that during all those years her prayer was not to be relieved from such trials, but, ‘ Lord, give me fortitude.’ She prayed to be staunch and courageous, but she did not lose confidence. In our temptations we should ever pray for grace, as this is God’s will ; but we should trust in the assurance given to St. Paul, ‘ My grace is sufficient for you,’ knowing that we shall not be tempted beyond what, with the aid of grace, we shall be able to bear and resist.

Our final consideration shall be the conduct that exposes men to fall when tempted. If temptations have been the means or occasion of making many Saints, it must also be admitted that they have wrecked many souls. If danger surrounds temptation at all times, how will it be if men, by their own act, expose themselves to temptation ? They invite

danger, and it will be strange if they do not suffer the consequences. In the first place, then, men must not, through their own fault, bring temptations on themselves, and they must not neglect necessary precautions against them. If they associate with those who speak against religion, or whose conversation is in other ways sinful, and if they frequent places that are likely to prove an occasion of sin, it is most probable that they will fall into sin, since they court the danger. There is danger also, in the second place, in being remiss in the time of temptation, as when men do not withdraw from the danger, and when they do not guard the senses. In dallying near the danger, and in delaying to employ active resistance, they are guilty of a presumption that may prove fatal. Perhaps in the case of those who might be described as ordinarily devout, more falls have resulted from this kind of remissness than from other faulty conduct, and we should therefore note the danger of it. There is danger, finally, when men neglect to pray as soon as they experience temptation, and when they discontinue their prayers, although the time of temptation has not passed. It is not for us to say, nor do we know, how long a temptation is to last; but as long as it assails us we must resist it, and prayer is our most powerful weapon. If we lower our arms the enemy will gain advantage over us. Even as Israel overcame Amalec while Moses kept his hands raised in prayer, so shall we triumph over temptation as long as we persevere in beseeching God for help. If we fail to do this we run the risk of being overcome.

You have still to battle with the winds and waves of temptation. Your past experience may have taught you lessons as to where the danger lies and what your weakness is. Repent now during the retreat of any remissness or want of courage, and recognise what your conduct should be if you would triumph. How many crowns will be bestowed on the day of victory? If you would obtain one do not shirk the contest, and bear in mind what is at stake. In the time of grave temptation there is at stake the grace and friendship of God, and your own well-being and everlasting happiness, and even in lesser temptations these blessings are to some extent affected. If you stand firm great rewards are promised, for our Lord has said: 'He that shall overcome shall not be hurt by the second death. He that shall overcome shall thus be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name out of the Book of Life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels. He that shall overcome I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God. To him that shall overcome, I will give to sit with Me in My throne; as I also have overcome, and am set down with My Father in His throne' (Apoc. ii. 11; iii. 5, 12, 21). As in all matters you should eschew the path that leads to failure and select the way of success, so should you, in dealing with temptations, be determined to adopt the means that promise victory. It is particularly sad when religious are met with who, when mature in the religious life, weakly yield to temptations that in earlier years they vigorously rejected. Now is

the time for all to renew their determination ever to 'watch and pray,' and to beg of God the grace not to yield to temptation. Do, then, what lies in your power when it comes upon you, and you may feel assured of the Divine aid and protection; for it is written: 'No evils shall happen to him that feareth the Lord, but in temptation God will keep him, and deliver him from evils' (Ecclus. xxxiii. 1).



## IX.

### *THE HOLY RULES.*

‘Take up My yoke upon you.’—ST. MATT. xi. 29.

RELIGIOUS submit themselves to a twofold yoke, namely, the obligations imposed both by the vows and by the holy rules of their Institute. They take upon themselves the solemn obligations of the vows, and their Institute demands their submission to its rule; they willingly subject themselves to this twofold yoke. The path of these obligations is the path of perfection to which they are called. If the yoke be borne dutifully and in a proper spirit, it will press only lightly on them, and it will yield consolation and support, and will be a help to them in the way of wisdom and goodness.

To be good religious, you must not pretend to confine your attention to the fulfilment only of your vows, as though the observance of your rules was of no importance. Fidelity to rule comes only next in importance to fidelity to the vows, and is an obligation binding upon all religious. If, therefore, you rightly deem the time of the retreat one in which you should examine yourselves upon your observance of your vows, it should also be reckoned a time to renew your dutifulness to your rules.

We will consider the use and necessity of a rule in religious Institutes, the particular benefit of the rule to the religious themselves, the various matters that a rule deals with, and the result of non-observance of rule.

The rules of an Institute receive the authorization of the Church, and have their claim to special respect and observance by reason of the ecclesiastical approbation which they have received. The rule should therefore be regarded as a regulation given to religious by the Church for their exterior conduct ; it is, moreover, a book of instruction, teaching them what is demanded in their daily life ; and it is also the manual of their Institute. Every Institute has its own particular and distinguishing rule, as it has its particular spirit and character. When St. Benedict, St. Bruno, St. Francis, St. Dominic, St. Ignatius, St. Francis de Sales, and other holy founders of religious Orders and Institutes, gathered around them those who wished to become their disciples, they deemed it their first duty to draw up a code of rules for their guidance and for their spiritual training, so that all might be imbued with the same spirit, and follow as far as possible one course of conduct. They strove, not only that their spiritual children should wear the same kind of habit, but also that they should be formed to a uniform character. They hoped for the happiest results from the observance of a rule common to all the members of their society or religious family. They were not disappointed ; and succeeding founders of Institutes, admiring the wisdom of this course, have in turn adopted it, and

it has become of universal practice in the Church. A religious rule is therefore regarded as stamped with a particular sacredness. We should, indeed, be willing to believe that God, who raised up His servants to be the fathers of religious families, inspiring them with the spirit proper to so exalted a calling, also guided them in framing the holy rule that was to form their children to their vocation. The spirit of the holy Founder still breathes in the rule that he has left to his Institute, and this is another motive to claim respect for the rule.

The rule is a disciplinary code. The wayward spirit of man needs a curb and a rein; and when many men are gathered together to work for the same ends, there must be a guiding hand and voice to direct and control them. God calls to a religious Institute persons from various walks in life, of various temperaments, with various views and inclinations, and of various nationalities; how, then, shall unity of purpose and effort be obtained if there is not a holy and a wise discipline to constrain and bear all minds, all hearts, and all hands in the desired direction? The rule establishes and maintains this necessary discipline, and it deserves and claims the submission and respect of all who are subject to it. If the rule be observed, there will be no disunion or disorder, and the ends of the Institute will be attained.

The rule of an Institute is the bond that unites all the members into one body. It regulates the relations that shall exist between them and among them, and those that shall exist between them and

the Institute. This latter claims the obedience of the members to the rule, and the various members rightly expect from one another common and universal observance of the same rules and regulations. Individual spirit and individual action become absorbed in one common movement, and while this brings about unity of action, it also tends to unity of purpose, sentiment, and affection. Thus are produced the family spirit and a holy charity that become the bond of the Institute. Thus, too, is produced that religious devotedness to duty and to the works of the Institute that causes it to flourish and to do good, and that happily gives edification in the Church, and draws vocations to the Institute. Its members are animated with fervour, which, as a holy flame, spreads its heat around. Devout souls are drawn to it, and thus it becomes more firmly and more widely established, and receives a perennial life. These considerations should impress you with the use and necessity of a rule in every Institute, and with the respect and love that the rule rightly claims and merits. Disregard of it cannot but do injury to the Institute, and hinder its well-being and progress.

We will now pass on to consider the special benefit to be derived by individual religious from a faithful observance of the rules of their Institute. Observance will tend to your own sanctification, and it will prove a help to you in carrying out the works of your Institute. If you regulate your conduct by your holy rules, you will first instruct and correct yourself, and seek to direct your own life wisely; and, following the admirable prescriptions of your rule, you will

be drawn near to God and become sanctified. Then, in fulfilling the ends of your Institute, may you reasonably and profitably turn your attention to others.\* If, however, religious are themselves unfaithful to the obligations of their state of life, they can scarcely be expected to be wise guides to others, and they will not be in a position to admonish and correct others. They would put it in the power of others to say: 'Physician, heal thyself.' You should love and observe your rule, because it has been given to you to be your rule of life, and because it is intended to be a safeguard to your vows and to grace, and a help to your perfection.

Persons who enter upon the path of a devout life take counsel about regulating their duties and well ordering their time. They study what is expected of them and what it would be well to do, and they strive so to arrange the fulfilment of these things as not to admit of any waste of time. They draw up for themselves what is termed a rule of life. This is what the Foundress of your Institute has done for you, and it is termed your rule. It teaches you how to put in practice the obligations of the religious state; it enjoins observances for the sanctification of your time; and it prescribes a right time and order for everything. Not only, then, does it lay down salutary practices, and point out the virtues that are

\* 'Ordo quippe naturalis est prius purgari deinde purgare; sapientiâ institui, atque ita demum sapientiâ alios instruere; lux fieri, et alios illuminare; ad Deum appropinquare, et ita alios deducere; sanctificari et postea sanctificare.'—ST. GREGORY NAZIANZEN.

expected, but it also saves you from a neglectful and disorderly manner of life. You should be convinced that you cannot afford to disregard the teaching and ordinances of your rule, since these are so wise and beneficial, and since it has been given to you, and accepted by you, as your rule of life. Disregard of rule is usually attended by some faultiness of conduct or neglect of duty, and it throws you out of line with the rest of the community. There should be a loyalty in your observance, and this cannot be attained and maintained without a certain amount of self-denial and devotedness. Devout lay persons who follow a rule of life have to sacrifice their self-will, their whims, their pleasure, and their convenience in doing so; fidelity to rule will make the same demand upon you. When you first embraced the rule, your zeal for its observance made you ready to overcome all obstacles and to sacrifice yourselves; has this zeal declined now that you have been in religion a few years? It should rather increase in intensity as time goes on, and make your loyalty to the rule more genuine and constant.

The rule should prove a safeguard to your vows. The keeping of your vows is the essential obligation of the religious state, and you must therefore make every provision necessary for their observance. The rule is the outer bulwark that insures this observance. Will you not be faithful to your solemn undertaking to practise poverty, chastity, and obedience, and to persevere in your vocation if, in complying with your rule, you meditate upon the teaching and example of our Lord and upon the requirements



of your state ; if you refresh and strengthen your soul with frequent prayer ; if you often approach the holy sacraments ; if you read pious books of instruction ; and if you observe the injunctions of your rule as to your exterior conduct ? Everything enjoined by the rule tends to shield and encourage virtue, and to help you to please God ; and it cannot therefore but help you to be faithful to the solemn obligations of your vows. Father Guilleré says that breaches of the vows do not ordinarily occur except in cases where the rules are not observed.

Fidelity to rule will also prove a safeguard to grace, for the rule, by exercising a salutary discipline over your exterior conduct and forming you to religious virtue, tends to strengthen and nourish what is good, and to create a horror of what is evil. God's special protection will be accorded to you if you live faithful to rule, and you may comfort yourselves with the assurance of Holy Writ, where it is said : ' He will keep the salvation of the righteous, and protect them that walk in simplicity, keeping the paths of justice, and guarding the ways of saints ' (Prov. ii. 7, 8). On the other hand, where rule is neglected a way is opened to disorder, and many evils may enter, exposing the soul to the loss of grace.\* Where there is disregard of rule there is usually some measure of tepidity, and with a continuance of this disregard tepidity will increase. What surety will this condition of the soul offer of perseverance in grace ? Perhaps a religious may

\* ' *Magnarum animarum naufragium ubi canones et recte vitæ institutio non vigent.*'—ST. EPHREM.

ask, Why do I not experience fervour? Let her examine her dutifulness to rule. One of the conditions for experiencing fervour might be expressed thus: with observance, fervour; without observance, no fervour. As fervour is the protection of grace, as well as being a sign of it, we may also regard observance as equally its protection.

Finally, the rule is designed to be a help to your perfection. You will see how this is so when you consider the wise directions for your conduct found in your book of rules, and then the virtues that the faithful observance of the rules calls into practice. The rule might be described as a handbook of wise advice and guidance. It does not lose sight of any of the demands of the religious life; it lays down regulations for the well-being of the community and of the members who compose it, and it inculcates lessons of virtue, discretion, and piety. Its injunctions reveal the prudence and goodness of the pious hand that drew it up, and win your admiration and respect. The rule is given you as your guide in the path of the perfection to which you are called. You recognize, in the next place, how the observance of its injunctions helps you in this path because of the virtues this observance demands. Day by day you submit yourself to rule, but you will not be faithful if you do not overcome yourselves in many ways, if you are not humble, if you do not show due consideration for your neighbour, and if you are not patient. It is thus seen that the rule demands the constant practice of self-denial, humility, charity, patience, and other virtues, and it may therefore be considered as

putting you through those daily exercises and drill that gradually form you and make you what you should be. It affords both guidance and training in the work of your sanctification.

We have now seen the benefit of the rule to the Institute itself and to its individual members; you will be yet more convinced of its utility when you examine the matters or duties with which it deals. You will find that it prescribes what your conduct should be in reference to God and to the duties of the interior life. The prescriptions are variously worded in the rule of the different Institutes of the Church, but they require reverence and piety in the worship of God, a tender love of our Lord and His holy Mother, and due devotion towards the Saints. They may also particularize acts and customs that are to be practised and maintained in matters of religious worship, and inculcate special piety, as, for instance, towards the Most Holy Sacrament. These wise directions of the rule develop the instincts of your faith, and satisfy the yearnings of your piety, and they stamp the soul with a religiousness befitting your consecration to God. The rule, perhaps, particularizes more fully in its directions concerning the interior life. You learn from it what should be your spirit and your aims in prosecuting your vocation. It inculcates the virtues you should ever seek to practise. There are prescriptions about prayer, religious exercises, meditation, and approaching the holy sacraments; and silence, recollection, and religious decorum are enjoined. The rule deal-

ing with these various details of religious observance constitutes itself your practical guide in the interior life. If only you follow its prescriptions your advance in the path of perfection will be sure and steady. If secular persons were to adopt them for only one week, what spiritual benefit they would experience! But they are laid down for your lifelong observance; what a help they should be to you! You should be ever thankful to God for having ordained so admirable a provision for your spiritual welfare.

The rule deals also with your duty to your superiors and to your sisters in religion. If your rule did not teach you in what light you should regard your superiors, you might not reflect that they represent a higher authority, and that their relations with you as superiors are vicarial. They do not act in their individual capacity, but in their authoritative character, in their dealings with you, and they accordingly claim your respect, submission, and affection. You would do wrong, then, to meet this claim upon other grounds or in a different spirit. It is not for you to adjudge the measure of your dutifulness towards your superiors according to their age, talent, virtue, or discretion. It would be unreligious on your part to say that you knew your superior before she was raised to her position of authority, and that she was no better than the rest; that you did not approve of the nomination or election, and you are unwilling to give her your support; that she was only a novice when you were already professed, and you cannot respect her as you would

another ; that you have more accomplishments and belong to a better family, and you look down upon her ; or that you see so many faults in her that you mean to obey her only when you cannot well do otherwise. If religious submission were to depend upon any such considerations as these, would it have any existence in your communities ? Would an angel from heaven satisfy the requirements of every one of the subjects ? Happily, there is no mention in your rule of such matters, and your obedience and respect are not to be regulated by them. You are to consider the authority she wields and your dutifulness to her, whosoever she may be, on that account, and by your filial and loyal relations with her you should strive to lighten her burden of responsibility, and to make her happy in fulfilling the duties of her office. Such would be your conduct if you regarded your superior according to the directions of your rule. How pitiable is the position of a superior when the members of the community disregard the duty they owe her, when they act independently or in an under-hand manner, obey reluctantly, have a communal spirit and a mutual understanding among themselves, taking care not to admit her into their confidence, or manifest no sympathy with her, seeming almost to treat her as the 'common enemy' ! How much unpleasantness and how much spiritual detriment must result from such an absence of the religious spirit !

The rule also treats of your relations with your sisters in religion. There must be mutual respect, consideration, good feeling, union, forbearance, and

charity, and you must carefully avoid special friendships, disputes, unkindness, and jealousy. Your union is under the auspices of religion, and you should therefore prevent entrance among you of the worldly, selfish, or party spirit so baneful to a holy charity. God has not drawn you together into a religious family to be to one another stumbling-blocks of disunion, but to assist one another, and to be to one another a source of edification. Among so many there cannot but be a variety of character, intelligence, views, and manners; but the rule binds all to the practice of the same virtues and to labour for the same ends, and if troubles arise all should desire and strive for peace, and readily display a forgiving spirit.

Your rule, lastly, lays down wise regulations for your dealings with externs. You have left the world, and you should now love the religious life. Duty may, however, bring you into contact with seculars. Let your relations with them be such as not to injure your religious spirit, or cause you to disregard the injunctions of the rule. You should not put yourselves in the power of seculars, or be so subservient to their wishes as to spend too much time in their society, or to enter into their schemes and meddle with their affairs without your superior's approval. They will respect you all the more if you maintain your religious character and adhere to a line of conduct in keeping with your religious obligations. It is of more importance to stand well in the eyes of your superior and the community than in the eyes of seculars. Let your rule be your guide also in this



matter, and in instructing you in carrying on the works of your Institute to the benefit and edification of your neighbour.

Our final consideration in this conference will be the result to the community and to the individual of non-observance of rule. It will not be necessary to enter into any lengthy disquisition into the relations between cause and effect in this matter, as the conclusions to be arrived at may be so easily deduced from our foregoing considerations. What, we ask, will be the condition of a community in which the rule is disregarded? In what measure shall we find in it the fruits of sanctification that ordinarily result from piety, regularity, and good works? What evidence will there be of advancement in virtue and of edification? Will the community stand in good repute? It is to be feared that much will be found wanting. The result of persistent neglect of rule will be seen in disregard of authority, in decline of piety, in personal disagreements, in community disorder, and in remissness in various ways. When the religious spirit dies out, another spirit will take its place; with it will also die the true community spirit, and then will appear a worldly spirit, and probably a spirit of self-seeking dissipation and independence. There will be sorrow and anxiety in the hearts of the few religious who lament this departure from fervour, and some vocations will be shaken.

What, we now ask, will be the condition of the individual religious who disregards the rule? We speak now of a member of a community that is

normally fervent ; what we say in her case would be especially true of a lax religious in a lax community. When a religious loses her love of rule and becomes remiss and unfaithful both as to its spirit and its letter, harm will be done to herself and to others. She will experience in herself unrest and dissatisfaction, and a lessening of her love of her vocation. There will be a disrelish for prayer and the spiritual exercises, and a want of generosity in her conduct ; there will be a dissipated and unsettled mind, and time will be wasted ; there will be great sensitiveness, and merited correction will be resented ; there might even be personal ambition ; fretfulness will be exhibited in time of sickness or trouble ; and, finally, there will be more frequent falls into sin and less sincere repentance. The harm done to her neighbour will be the anxiety caused to her superiors, the disedification given to her community, and the diminished fruitfulness of her works for others. A falling away from observance proves, therefore, detrimental to religiousness and peace.

Let us make one more reflection before we conclude this study, and let us ask in what things a religious should find her pleasure. Should she find it in vanity, news seeking, the society and esteem of seculars, indulgence of the appetite, needless relaxation, useless reading, or amusements ? Will these pursuits sanctify her days and render her life meritorious ? Will they elevate her mind, purify her heart, and assist her in the path of perfection ? Are there not better things to desire and to find pleasure in ? St. Paul wrote : ‘ We trust better things of you, and

nearer to salvation' (Heb. vi. 9). 'Follow after charity, be zealous for spiritual gifts' (1 Cor. xiv. 1). Let there be useful relaxation and cheerful recreation in due season, according to the wise provision of the rule; but let the pleasure of a religious be found, not in what will relax discipline, dissipate devotion, enervate the spiritual life, and waste time, but in what will be profitable to piety, charity, and edification. A religious in her love of rule might take pattern by David in the pleasure he experienced in fulfilling God's commands. We hear him say: 'Thy justifications were the subject of my song, in the place of my pilgrimage. . . . I have purchased Thy testimonies for an inheritance for ever, because they are the joy of my heart' (Ps. cxviii. 54, 111).

Examine yourselves during the retreat upon your appreciation of your rule, and upon your observance of it. You have accepted it with all its prescriptions, and you are in honour and in duty bound to conformity with their demands. Your rule and your daily crosses are your daily helps to perfection. You do not reach the perfection of religious virtue at once as at a bound, but step by step, little by little; and the religious exercises, observances, and discipline which may seem of little significance in themselves, and your crosses and contradictions which may seem irksome, all have their importance in the providence of God in leading you to it. In this light should you regard them, for it is the true understanding of what they are to you. Our Lord says: Take My yoke upon you. You will swell the ranks of good religious who are faithful to rule; and by your fidelity

to its ordinances, while you hope to avoid many failings and miseries, you will manifest your desire to please our Lord and to advance in perfection, your appreciation of your vocation, and your zeal to walk with constancy in the path of edification and in the footsteps of the saints, for this is the sure way that leads to the kingdom of God's elect.

## X.

### *THE LAST JUDGMENT.*

‘Men withering away for fear, and expectation of what shall come upon the whole world.’—ST. LUKE xxi. 26.

WE have read in history of appalling days of calamity, in which God’s scourges have been multiplied. When God foretold by His prophet Sophonias how He would punish His rebellious and sinful people, He declared that the time of His visitation upon Juda should be ‘a day of wrath, a day of tribulation and distress, a day of calamity and misery, a day of darkness and obscurity’ (Soph. i. 15). Such days occurred, too, as foretold by our Lord, during the siege of Jerusalem; but the last day shall be the most terrifying and calamitous of all. On that day will God cite before Him, not one tribe or people, but all nations and individuals who have ever dwelt on earth, and He will sit in judgment upon all. This is one of the awful truths which from the beginning holy Church has announced to all men, at the same time exhorting all to prepare themselves for the day of the Lord and for the judgment that shall then be passed upon them. Consider that in this retreat she bids you to reflect upon the events

of that day of general judgment, and to learn as a result of your reflections how to prepare yourselves for it, so as to avert the irremediable calamity of God's condemnation, and secure His favourable sentence with the immeasurable and everlasting reward attendant upon it.

We will pass over the consideration of the signs of the approach of the last day—the clashing of arms in fearful warfare, the disturbance of the elements, the distress among nations, the roaring of the sea, the moving of the heavens, and all the other terrors that shall announce it—and we will come to the judgment itself. In vain have the wicked called on the mountains to fall upon them and hide them from the face of the Judge, who is no other than that gentle Saviour whom in life they rejected; for now, most miserable and weighed down by the multitude of their sins and by the Divine indignation, they must hear from His judgment-seat the sentence of their final and everlasting reprobation. We will bring four matters under our consideration, namely, the examination of their wicked conduct, their conviction, their confusion, and their condemnation.

It will go hard with the sinner when that God, whose chief praise (Ps. cxliv. 9) has ever been that He is a God of infinite mercy, shall vest Himself only in wrath and indignation, and no longer in mercy. Thus did He show Himself in dealing with the impenitent Egyptians, as we read in the Book of Wisdom (xix. 1): 'As to the wicked, even to the end, there came upon them wrath without mercy.' So, too, shall it be on the day of judgment in the



case of all impenitent sinners; for on that day of reckoning God will be no longer the tender, long-suffering Father, but the inexorable Judge.

Judgment will be passed upon the whole conduct of the wicked from their earliest childhood—from the moment at which they became capable of moral guilt. No act contrary to any of the moral virtues, no breach of the Divine law, no yielding to temptation, no scandal given, no omission of duty, no secret guilt, no bad thought or desire, no vicious motive or intention, no wicked delectation or complacency, no sinister design, no sacrilegious act, no rebellion against authority, no imperilling of one's vocation or salvation, no wilful going into the danger of sin, no hypocrisy, will escape the scrutiny of the most just, exact, and inexorable Judge. Then, in that searching examination, shall be laid bare all the fits of anger, all the workings of pride and vanity, all the sins against modesty and purity and against temperance, all the uncharitable conduct, all the disobedience, all the falsehoods, all the profane words, all the disrespect shown to parents and superiors, of which the wicked were ever guilty in their youth, in their maturer years, and in their old age. Then, therefore, shall be made manifest dishonourable actions, neglect and indifference in God's service, wrongs inflicted, loose conversations, crimes, impieties, irreligion, avarice, and every kind of wickedness. All these moral disorders and omissions shall be displayed in full light with every circumstance that added to the degree of guilt, such as the clearer knowledge, the higher calling, the more abundant gifts of nature

and grace, the more careful education, the greater indebtedness and the more edifying surroundings, and, moreover, the evil effects of the sin upon others.

The religious, as well as every other class of persons, will have to stand the ordeal of this exact examination.

She will stand before the judgment-seat, first of all, in her character as God's creature, a creature endowed by God with the light of reason and with other gifts of nature. By the light of reason she has known the natural law, and on the day of judgment she will have to answer for every sin committed contrary to the light and guidance of her conscience instructed by right reason. Her conscience was also enlightened by faith—by supernatural knowledge and belief. By this light she has seen more clearly how God's law demanded the submission of her mind, heart, and will, and ordered the whole conduct of her life; how this law required the avoidance of sin, the fulfilment of duty, and the proper direction of her temporal life to the heavenly life beyond the grave (Rom. ii. 15, 16).

Next will the religious stand before the judgment-seat in her character as a Christian. She has been regenerated in the waters of holy baptism; she has received the light of the Gospel; she has been familiar with all that is beautiful, attractive, ennobling, and holy in the Gospel teaching and in a Christian life. She has, moreover, held special relationship with our Divine Lord, and, by many meditations upon His life and teaching, she has learned therefrom the lesson of the Christian virtues of humility, meekness, patience, charity, purity, and

self-denial. She has recognized the perfection of the Christian law, which allows of no compromise with evil, demands the severe suppression of the passions, and leads men to holiness. By this law, then, she will be judged on that day of reckoning as to her thoughts, words, affections, motives, designs, desires, and actions.

She will next be examined in her character as a religious, called to tend to perfection by the fulfilment of her vows and the observance of her rule. She was placed in a state of life conducive to virtue, piety, and holiness. She should have lived poor, chaste, and obedient; she should have been observant of rule, sanctifying her own life, and giving edification to others. She should have kept herself from loving the world, or giving to God a divided service. She should have nourished her mind with religious thought and knowledge, and her spirit by receiving the holy sacraments with religious fervour and by devout prayer. She should have discharged conscientiously the duties imposed upon her by the rule and by her superiors; and, finally, she should have avoided all dangers to her vocation and what would be detrimental to her religious spirit. The day of judgment will reveal what her conduct has been in all these respects, and if she has been faithful to her religious obligations. Well will it be for her if she shall then be able to say truly that she belonged to God, and that her first and paramount aim was always to please Him.

In these various characters shall the religious stand before the judgment-seat. Her works shall be

examined (St. Matt. xvi. 27); but what about her words? Every saying of our Lord must be fulfilled, and His pronouncement is this: 'I say unto you that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment' (St. Matt. xii. 36). The religious will be examined as to words dictated by jealousy or envy because others have excelled her in talents and virtue; as to words of bitterness, ill-will, or dislike proceeding from the venom of an ill-balanced or prejudiced mind and heart; and as to words of untruthfulness and deceit, and even of detraction and calumny—words that have offended God, and wounded the person uttering them, the person concerning whom they were spoken, and those who heard them.

The strict and awful examination at the judgment-seat of the Most Holy will also be turned upon her thoughts (1 Par. xxviii. 9). How rapidly and silently thought succeeds thought in the human mind! Was the religious careful in watching over her mind, and in combating all sinful and unworthy thoughts? Did she promptly banish thoughts of pride and self-conceit, uncharitable and vindictive thoughts, lascivious and impure thoughts, rebellious thoughts, and thoughts against faith or religion?

If the religious shall have to give an account of every idle word and every wicked thought, there will also be an exact scrutiny of her affections; for our Lord has said: 'The things which proceed out of the mouth, come forth from the heart, and those things defile a man; for from the heart come forth evil thoughts' (St. Matt. xv. 18, 19). She will have

to give an account of her friendships and antipathies, of her self-love, of her love of the world and vanities, and of all creature love ; also of her leniency towards her own spiritual weaknesses, and of her uncombated attachment to what was the occasion of her many venial sins. We know how pure and disinterested, how pious and God-fearing, the affections of the heart of a religious should be to carry her through the world without making her of the world, and to lead her to feel for others without, however, binding her to them in any inordinate or imprudent way ; and how her affections should therefore be held in a wise balance in all circumstances so as to maintain her ever in the path of prudence and moderation. If, then, the religious has erred from this path, how shall she bear the examination of all her affections—of all the attractions and emotions of a heart that should have ever beaten with love for her Divine Master and with unwearying zeal for His glory ?

We will not stay to consider how, at the judgment-seat, account will also be taken of the sinner's abuse or neglect of the many gifts of nature and grace that will merit the condemnation foretold by our Lord : ' The unprofitable servant cast ye out into the exterior darkness ' (St. Matt. xxv. 30 ; vii. 19), but we will now consider his conviction.

The examination in full detail shall expose all the sinner's wickedness and its malice. What he may have been successful in concealing during life will at the Last Judgment be manifested in the clear light of the noonday sun. Will he, perhaps, be able to escape or set aside a conviction ? Here in this life

men can throw a cloak over their evil-doings; they can explain away their guilt; and they have even been known to turn on the innocent man who has been the victim or witness of their misdeeds, and to upbraid him with many supposed faults, pretending perhaps an injury received or exasperation at unjust treatment measured out to them. At the last day, however, there will be no such way of escape; there will be absolutely no defence of crime or excuse for sin, and the sinner will stand convicted by his own conscience and by the unanimous voice of all God's creatures.

There shall fall from the all-holy throne of the Sovereign Judge a clear and penetrating light that shall reveal all the depths of the sinner's soul. The Lord on that day 'will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts' (1 Cor. iv. 5). The sinner himself shall see and acknowledge all his guilt and the rectitude of the Divine law that condemns it.

Holy Job says that if man contends with God, 'he cannot answer Him one for a thousand' (Job ix. 3); but the just also shall on the last day sit in judgment on the wicked. They shall do so by the testimony of their lives. If, then, the religious who has fallen from grace shall attempt to advance as an excuse for her sinful conduct the impossibility of keeping the law and living in charity, there shall arise against her the five wise virgins who, with the same graces and opportunities, and exposed to the same dangers and difficulties, yet kept their lamps trimmed and supplied with oil, and entered with the Bridegroom to the



marriage (St. Matt. xxv. 10). If this miserable religious shall plead as an excuse for a self-indulgent life that mortification was unnatural, and that the demands of nature should be met by some compromise, there shall stand against her the glorious martyrs carrying their implements of torture, and the holy anchorites and penitents who, bearing in their bodies the cross of Christ, crucified the flesh and its concupiscences (Gal. v. 24). And if this lax and fallen religious shall venture to excuse her neglect of rule and disregard of duty on the plea of bodily fatigue or absence of special notice and encouragement, there shall appear against her a mighty phalanx of devout religious of every age and nation, who, under far more trying circumstances, have been faithful to both the spirit and letter of their obligations, and have won their crown.

Nothing shall be wanting to the full conviction of the wicked, for Christians from every land, and from every station in life, shall arise and condemn them.

On that last day shall be fulfilled what our Lord foretold when He said: 'I say to you that many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into the exterior darkness' (St. Matt. viii. 11, 12).

Let us now pass on to notice the confusion with which the wicked shall be overwhelmed at this stage of the proceedings, and to listen to the sentence passed upon them. In this world the right order of things is often disturbed, inasmuch as the wicked

often appear in the garb of righteousness, for, carefully concealing their wicked designs or evil actions, they go forth before the world as upholders of morality and models of decorum, whereas shame and ignominy should ever attend vice, and honour and esteem should wait upon virtue. At the last day—on the day of man's final judgment—right order shall be restored, and, in the view of all mankind, God will award to every creature according to his merits; and then shall the wicked be confounded with shame, and the just shall shine as the sun (St. Matt. xiii. 43).

On that solemn day a voice shall reach the uttermost ends of the earth, resounding in the deep waters as well as in the long-disused graves: 'Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment.' At the judgment-seat of the All-Holy error shall be crushed and hypocrisy condemned; there only truth and virtue shall prevail. Come, ye dead, to the seat of true and eternal justice and judgment. With what countenance shall the wicked answer their arraignment and accept their sentence? All the wicked, in their vast numbers, shall be gathered together, and with bitter and desperate words they shall reproach themselves and one another. Then, before all mankind, shall everyone appear in his true colours, and his crimes, secret and public, shall be made manifest to all; and in that assembly the hypocrite who strove to pass as virtuous, the unfaithful religious whose life belied her calling, and all who have fallen from a high condition of grace, shall be upbraided by the rest of the wicked, who shall say: 'Thou also art wounded, as well as we: thou art become like unto us' (Isa. xiv. 10). They

all shall be seized, not only with anguish and despair, but also with a shame and a confusion that they shall never be able to shake off.

The day for deceit shall then have passed by for ever. In this life men, in order to justify their wickedness when contemplated, or to calm their minds after its commission, have striven to deceive themselves; and Satan also has sought to delude them, so as to lead them to worship vice even as a deity, and so as to overturn the moral order and make men love evil and disregard virtue. As a consequence moral chaos has been created, consciences have been wickedly falsified, light has been perverted, and hearts and morals have been corrupted. But at the day of judgment the voice of God shall command the right ordering of everything, and His light shall dispel the moral darkness: chaos shall be no longer. Truth and virtue shall then appear in all their beauty, and error and vice in all their deformity. The just shall be in honour, and the wicked in confusion. This is what the Book of Wisdom foretells, where it says: 'Then shall the just stand with great constancy against those that have afflicted them. . . . These seeing it, shall be troubled with terrible fear' (Wisd. v. 1, 2). Then, because the wicked shall have become the children of everlasting reprobation, for whom no regard, honour, esteem, or sympathy shall ever again be shown, so overwhelming shall be their confusion that they shall wish if possible to hide themselves from the gaze of all. When the sinner broke the Divine law, he said: 'Darkness compasseth me about,

and the walls cover me, and no man seeth me; whom do I fear? The Most High will not remember my sins' (Ecclus. xxiii. 26); but at the last day it shall be no longer possible for the wicked to conceal their shame or hide their guilt. Then shall neither darkness nor distance be available to help their escape from the face of an angry God, and in their utter confusion they shall say to the mountains and rocks: 'Fall upon us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of Their wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?' (Apoc. vi. 16, 17).

Such shall be the preludes, so terrible for the wicked, that shall be enacted on the last day; they only lead up to the decisive event of that momentous day. It shall be the day of judgment, and for all who shall have died in the state of mortal sin the judgment shall be one of condemnation and reprobation. This sentence shall be the climax, and it shall be given effect to immediately, and with a reality and intensity that shall never diminish. When a prisoner is brought forth from his prison-cell to the court of the judge, it is upon the pronouncement of his sentence that his feelings overpower him: is it one of liberty or exile, of imprisonment or torture, of life or death? What, however, is this picture of an earthly tribunal compared to the great and awful court of eternal justice where God sits in judgment upon the creature of His hands and the adopted child of His love whom He must condemn? Christ our Lord will come 'with great power and

majesty' (St. Luke xxi. 27) to pronounce a sentence that shall be irrevocable.

Let now the sun of justice shine in the heavens, let all iniquity be condemned and perish, and let everyone receive the award of his deeds, 'for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor desire of gifts' (2 Par. xix. 7). 'The earth shook and trembled,' sang the Psalmist, 'the foundations of the mountains were troubled and were moved, because He was angry with them. . . . He bowed the heavens and came down' (Ps. xvii. 8, 10). 'God shall come manifestly. . . . He shall call heaven from above and the earth to judge His people' (Ps. xlix. 3, 4). 'The angels shall go out, and shall separate the wicked from among the just' (St. Matt. xiii. 49). 'He shall set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on His left' (xxv. 33); for it shall be then the 'day of wrath and revelation of the just judgment of God' (Rom. ii. 5).

Our Lord has not left us in ignorance of what the sentences shall be. There shall be only two. The first shall be that pronounced on the just. With what useless regrets the wicked shall be filled upon hearing it! The Judge shall announce all the good deeds and meritorious conduct of the just, and declare their works of mercy not only as pleasing to Him, but even as done to Himself (St. Matt. xxv. 40). Then, with loving invitation, He shall invite them to the heavenly espousals and to His kingdom of everlasting glory, saying: 'Come, ye blessed of My Father.'

He will then pass the second sentence. Turning

His glance—not now one of reproach, but of anger—upon the wicked, to cast them from Him for ever, He will pronounce on them the terrible sentence that shall at once be carried into effect, saying: ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the devil and his angels’ (St. Matt. xxv. 41). Against this sentence there shall be no appeal—no, not to Mary, whom the wicked have at times invoked as their tender heavenly Mother; nor to the Saints, who were but now their brethren in Christ; nor to the Cross, which is now no longer to them the guarantee of mercy and salvation, but a sign to inspire them with dread (St. Matt. xxiv. 30). As to the Judge, once their loving Saviour and the Good Shepherd of their souls, He is there on His throne, not to bestow grace or show mercy, but to award the punishment they have incurred. Once His eyes looked upon them with love and compassion, but now they are turned upon them with just anger; once His sacred hands were open to enrich them with the blessings of a bountiful providence, but now they are extended to inflict punishment; His sacred feet that once sought them as the sheep which was lost now repel them, for the time has now come when God shall make His enemies His footstool (Ps. cix. 1). Before them—and there is no means of escape from it—is the bottomless pit of everlasting fire; and now our Lord’s words come to their minds: ‘How will you flee from the judgment of hell?’ (St. Matt. xxiii. 33), and the Scriptures shall be fulfilled, for ‘The Lord shall laugh them to scorn, and they shall fall after this without honour,



and be a reproach among the dead for ever' (Wisd. iv. 18, 19).

The just, singing the song of their happy deliverance, follow their Divine Saviour into the realms of bliss; but the reprobate are plunged into that pit of fire that shall never be extinguished, and into that abode of despair where the worm shall gnaw unceasingly, and into that exterior darkness where there shall be for ever weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Such are the events of the day of judgment as portrayed for us in the holy Gospels. They cannot but make a deep impression on your minds; and now, with St. Peter's first converts, you may inquire, 'What shall we do?' You wish to escape the judgment to come. Be faithful to the duties of your vocation. St. Peter's counsel in his second Epistle indicates the safe path to be pursued: 'Labour the more,' he says, 'that by good works you may make sure your calling and election; for, doing these things, you shall not sin at any time; for so an entrance shall be ministered to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ' (i. 10, 11). St. Paul counsels you where he says: 'If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged' (1 Cor. xi. 31). Pass judgment now upon your thoughts, desires, affections, words, and actions, that you may, by correcting what is amiss, and by making exact what is lax, and fervent what is tepid, prepare yourselves for the judgment to come. Now, while there is yet time, you may seek the tribunal of mercy, and you may

renew your promises of fealty and win favour with God. Be fully resolved never to deceive yourselves about your failings and weaknesses, or gloss over your faults, or deal leniently with your evil tendencies, for these are what would bring you under the just and unerring judgment of God; and seek ever by wise, holy, and dutiful conduct to live as the true servants of Christ, so as to merit to be of the number of those who shall at the last day hear His loving invitation, 'Come, ye blessed of My Father, possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world' (St. Matt. xxv. 34).

## FOURTH DAY.

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### XI.

#### *REPENTANCE.*

‘How great is the mercy of the Lord, and His forgiveness to them that turn to Him!’—ECCLUS. xvii. 28.

THE gracious assurances of His mercy and regard which God so often gives us in the Holy Scriptures comfort us in the steps we take towards our conversion. He desires our repentance, and vouchsafes to us every aid to effect it and render it complete. How often, alas! do men, miserably attached to their evil courses, disregard the Divine invitations, and become by their perversity and folly an obstacle to God’s mercy and to their own conversion and salvation! Happily, such is not the case with religious who readily and thankfully correspond with the grace of a retreat, so they are consoled and encouraged by every indication of God’s desire to see them truly repentant.

In the retreat a religious experiences a desire to be more exact when there has been remissness, and to be more faithful when there has been positive undutifulness—that is, she sees a contrast between

what she has been and what she ought to be, and she wishes to change and correct her ways. Certain steps must be taken. Transition from tepidity to fervour, and from faultiness to fidelity, is not an imperceptible process, nor is it effected by a mere act of volition; the passage from one condition to the other involves repentance and amendment—repentance representing the movement necessary for the transition, and amendment the completion of that movement. The grace of the retreat will help a religious to effect the transition.

In every case of tepidity and faultiness there has been a departure to some distance from the right path; your steps must be retraced if you would regain it. The Holy Scripture says: 'Undisciplined souls have erred' (Wisd. xvii. 1). They have erred, some in a less serious way than others, they have wandered from the track. If they do not return to it, they may go yet further astray. If you have only failed in fulfilling obligations of lesser moment, if you have only disregarded lesser points of duty, or if you have only fallen into various venial sins, you have in some measure erred, and repentance and amendment are necessary. You have already become aware of the need of correction in various matters, and light has come to you to show you in what direction greater effort is desirable; you must not be satisfied with only knowing what you should do, but you must also correspond with the grace that would enable you to do it. Just as David said: 'I have thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies' (Ps. cxviii. 59), so should you

say: I am thankful to be now aware of what is wanting to me, and with God's grace I will strive to do what He requires of me.

You have by true repentance to dismiss the spirit of remissness and to quit the ways of faultiness; but what is needed that your repentance may be sincere and effectual? This is what we are to consider in this conference. We will draw lessons from the conduct of the prodigal son, when, after all his disorders, he was brought to a condition of dishonour, misery, and want. Like him you must enter into yourselves, and be determined to do better, and you must both desire God's mercy and take every step necessary to a sincere conversion. Happily, you are full of faith in the Divine compassion, and only too grieved by the knowledge of your faultiness.

Our Lord tells us of the prodigal son that he returned to himself, teaching us that the first step to conversion is the recognition of our misery and sin, and a conviction of the graces and blessings of which, through our own fault, we are deprived. 'Returning to himself he said: How many hired servants in my father's house abound with bread, and I here perish with hunger?' (St. Luke xv. 17). The sinner must enter into himself to recognize his condition of spiritual destitution. If he compares this with the condition of God's servants in the state of grace, there will appear before his eyes a practical view of his misery. We will not here dwell upon the lamentable consequences of mortal sin, but we will reflect upon what a negligent religious may discover in her condition as a result of her introspection. She

remembers the time when her soul was sensitive to every kind of wilful thought, but she is painfully aware that now, if not deterred by human respect or some external result, she makes little of sullyng her soul by venial sins. She recollects the peace and joy she formerly felt in every work of piety and duty; but now these sentiments are changed to disrelish and half-heartedness, if not to unwillingness and weariness. She notices the cheerfulness, zeal, and modesty of the devout members of her community; but these virtues, instead of affording her edification and stimulating her to greater effort, have only excited her to jealousy and dislike. Now, upon her conversion, she has to acknowledge this evil-mindedness with confusion and sorrow. She has observed the readiness and fervour with which others have approached the holy sacraments, but she knows how often she has abstained from Holy Communion, and with what imperfect dispositions she has approached the sacrament of Penance. She sees others humble, charitable, obedient, and patient; but she has to acknowledge that she herself is vain, inconsiderate, wayward, and impatient.

This negligent religious, now repentant, owns to all this faultiness, and laments the consequent loss of so many graces. Like the prodigal son, her thoughts turn to her Father. 'The hand of the Lord is not shortened that it cannot save, neither is His ear heavy, that it cannot hear' (Isa. lix. 1). She wishes to join the number of His dutiful and devout servants, and she lifts up to Him her soul in fervent prayers and sighs, begging the grace of



sincere conversion. In this she follows the prodigal in the second step towards a new life; for when he had duly considered his miserable plight, he determined not to stay as he was. 'I will arise,' he said, 'and will go to my father.' Just as it would be useless on the part of a sinner to pretend to repent if he were to remain under the influence of the surroundings that led to his fall, so, too, would there be but little hope of the sincere conversion of a remiss religious if there was no attempt on her part to arise from her negligent and faulty ways, and to remove from herself whatever might detain her in them. I will arise, she must say, from my ways of disobedience and uncharitableness, from my neglect of piety, and from my undutifulness to rule, and I will return to God and to the Sacred Heart of my Lord with true earnestness and devotedness.

There must, however, be a repentant avowal of the faults committed, and in this the negligent religious must be ready to take with the prodigal the third step towards true conversion. 'I will go to my father, and will say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee.' The avowal of our guilt must, in the first place, be made in our own heart; but it must be accompanied by the resolution of confessing it in the tribunal of Penance. The remiss religious must say: I own that I have done wrong, and I will give effect to this avowal by making a good confession. I will, in the holy tribunal, unburden my conscience, and there seek pardon and reconciliation. It is not enough for me to know my faults; for I also desire to have my soul

cleansed from all guiltiness in the fountain of the Precious Blood of my Saviour, and to hear from the lips of His minister the consoling words of pardon. The unrepentant know their faults, but that does not suffice for their conversion; they must also confess them.

If there is to be true conversion, we must, in the fourth place, imitate the prodigal son in his interior dispositions of sorrow, desire of pardon, and firm purpose of amendment. We have already made avowal of our guilt to ourselves; we must further acknowledge it, with proper dispositions, to God, whom we have offended. The prodigal determined to say to his father: 'I am not now worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants.' The negligent religious should, in imitation of this model of sincere repentance, make a humble acknowledgment to God of the faultiness and unworthiness of her conduct. God deserved greater consideration at her hands; hers was a poor return to the Sacred Heart that had so loved her and poured out Its bounties upon her. She has been undutiful, tepid, and heedless, and there has been little or no attempt at amendment. Now she feels that she deserves to be treated as the last of all—the lowest place in God's service would now befit her; and, full of such sentiments, she gives expression to her sincere sorrow, and pleads for God's forgiveness. She now desires and purposes to make amends for the past, and she particularizes the points of conduct in which she is determined, by God's grace, to be more dutiful.

We now come to the fifth stage of true conversion.

Up to the present everything has been interior, and preparatory for the final stages. Now must follow the carrying out of our good resolutions, and the practical work of our repentance. The Gospel of Christ enjoins the doing of penance: 'Do penance, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand' (St. Matt. iv. 17); 'Except you do penance, you shall all likewise perish' (St. Luke xiii. 5). The genuineness of our repentance is open to suspicion if there is no penitential action. St. Paul says: 'The sorrow that is according to God worketh penance steadfast unto salvation' (2 Cor. vii. 10). The Gospel narrative tells us how the prodigal took the steps necessary to obtain pardon and reconciliation when it says: 'And rising he came to his father.' In imitation of him the remiss religious has already said: 'I will arise'; she must now give practical effect to her good resolutions if she wishes to complete the work of repentance.

The sixth stage is reached when the prodigal makes his confession. 'And the son said to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee.' The humble and candid confession of our sins is a salutary discipline enjoined by God in His wisdom. This is the Penance necessary, when possible, for obtaining the remission of mortal sin, and salutary and effective in the case of every kind of sin. The negligent religious will therefore avail herself of the sacrament of Penance, therein to confess all her faultiness, and to receive absolution and the special graces of which it will be a channel to her soul. When the prodigal added to his confession the

words : ' I am not now worthy to be called thy son,' he seemed to imply a readiness to accept, in atonement for his evil conduct, any punishment that his father might deem it well to demand as a condition of his forgiveness; and, finally, in the same spirit should the remiss religious be prepared to fulfil any penance imposed by the priest as a sacramental satisfaction. If she follows the prodigal in all these steps to sincere repentance and conversion, she may feel assured of a happy reconciliation such as that which resulted in his case. ' How great is the mercy of the Lord, and His forgiveness to them that turn to Him !'

The merciful and tender behaviour of the prodigal's father depicts for us God's dealings with the truly penitent. God seems not to remember the number and gravity of our offences, or the ingratitude our conduct has manifested. There is no upbraiding of the sinner, but only joy at his conversion (St. Luke xv. 5-10). Grace is restored, and every token of affection and favour is lavished upon the penitent. Now is the bitterness of sorrow changed to the sweetness of reconciliation; where there was misery there is happiness, and where there was unrest there is peace. How truly David said: ' Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven' ! God seems to say to penitents what He said by His prophet to His people : ' I will love them freely: My wrath is turned away from them' (Osee xiv. 5); ' freely,' because now they place no impediment in the way of My benevolence. A happy and holy change has been effected, and, the evil way having

been resolutely abandoned, the path of virtue and dutifulness is loved and followed: 'To the penitent He hath given the way of justice' (Eccius. xvii. 20).

The prodigal son has now been received with joy and festivity in his father's house, and there we leave him. There he will prove grateful for his father's forgiveness and love, he will strive to make amends for his unworthy and wicked conduct, and he will never again return to that distant country in which he squandered his portion and fell into evil courses. The remiss religious has a duty to perform to give proof of the sincerity of her repentance. She must now make amends in her community for any disedification given, and repair any scandal of which, by her conduct or advice, she may have been the cause. Her sisters in religion will not be over-exacting; for if only she now becomes observant and pious, they will deem it sufficient satisfaction for what has been faulty and disedifying. For her own sake and for theirs she must maintain her renewed dutifulness, and be on her guard against weariness and negligence, lest there should be any relapse into unsatisfactory ways, for then her last state would be worse than her former one (2 St. Pet. ii. 20). By her conversion she has broken the iron chain, or the silken cord, that bound her to her imperfections, and she is determined not to submit to such bondage again; she has quitted the slippery path descending into unwholesome pasturages, and she is resolved not to quit the higher and safer paths of a wise discipline and generous service. She has seen how vanity and dissipation lead to the commission of

many venial sins, and draw the mind from God ; and now she hopes by a greater love of virtue and observance to purify her affections, and make progress in the way of perfection. If she has, in the past, neglected prayer and devotion, and put obstacles to the operations of grace, she will now be more recollected, and strive to be fervent.

When we consider these, her new dispositions, do we not recognize in them the happy fruits of a sincere repentance ? The hard ground has been softened, the stubborn spirit has been bent, and the wayward will has become submissive. While St. Paul was in bitterness before his conversion, he was ‘breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord’ (Acts ix. 1) ; but when grace had touched his heart, this fierce persecutor meekly exclaimed : ‘Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do ?’ The once remiss religious now desires no longer to make her own will a law to herself, but she seeks to do God’s good pleasure in every way that it may be made manifest to her. Having escaped from the thralldom of her imperfections and from the delusions of a self-indulgent nature, she does not now flinch from what may be trying, nor is she afraid of the effort required in the warfare of the spiritual life and in the practice of virtue. She now walks in the light of a clear discernment of God’s claims to her love and devotedness, of her indebtedness to our Lord, of the obligations of her state, and of the blessings resulting from piety and observance. Whereas her previous condition was one of lethargy and indifference, now it is happily changed to one



of vitality, energy, and zeal. Let us rejoice in this new triumph of grace.

We call to mind the action of God upon chaos. The Spirit of God moved over the waters, and order took the place of disorder, light succeeded darkness, a right place was found for everything; and a beautiful world, wonderful in its every detail as well as in its general conception, took the place of what had been shapeless and obscure. No less marked is the action of God by His grace upon the soul; for truth succeeds to error, the sweetness of piety to the bitterness of sin, the good odour of virtue to the corruption of evil, and supernatural life to spiritual death. With this happy change effected by grace, and with the reign of order, the soul is now under the influence of wisdom and piety; the way of duty is loved, the cross is carried with patience and courage, humility and charity are displayed in relations with the neighbour, and supernatural motives raise the character and merit of even ordinary actions. What is said in such general terms as these applies in some measure to the case of a remiss religious, when, under the grace of a retreat, she resolutely quits a condition of unsatisfactoriness for one more becoming her holy vocation.

One of your intentions in making this retreat was to follow the guidance of grace. You have not dwelt upon your manner of life except with the desire to make it what God wishes it to be. You are not like those wretched misguided people who prefer their own evil way to the way of grace and peace to which God in His goodness calls them. These impenitent

souls imitate the tribes of Israel who disregarded God's ordinances and refused to be converted. God's message to them by the prophets was: 'Return from your wicked ways and keep My precepts. . . . And they hearkened not, but hardened their necks . . . and they rejected His ordinances . . . and they followed vanities and acted vainly' (4 Kings xvii.). Perhaps they answered in the words of others of whom we read in Jeremias: 'We have no hopes; for we will go after our own thoughts, and we will do every one according to the perverseness of his evil heart' (Jer. xviii. 12). Because they would not hearken and be converted, God cast these people off to let them become captives of the Assyrians. He abandons the impenitent, leaving them under the dishonourable bondage of their sins.

Repentance is as the bitter draught that is prescribed by the physician to bring about the patient's recovery; it is unpleasant to the palate, but comforting in its effects. You have studied what your repentance should be to prove effectual. Pray, then, to God whose gift it is to enable you to fulfil its requirements, in order that by means of it you may happily find yourselves renewed in fervour and dutifulness. David prayed: 'Convert us, O God, and show us Thy face, and we shall be saved' (Ps. lxxix. 4). Make now your reckoning with God and with your own conscience, to save yourselves from confusion upon the approach of the day of reckoning; and avail yourselves of the present time of grace to secure those desirable fruits of repentance which bring satisfaction to the soul, and establish a right

order in your manner of life. Let the fragrant flower of piety blossom again, let the bright lamp of charity be renewed, let the melodious accents of dutiful praise ascend with new fervour to heaven, and let the edification of a dutiful religious life be ever as a holy sacrifice acceptable in the sight of God. God will then be propitious, and He will crown your repentance and amendment with the blessings of His mercy and compassion (Ps. cii. 4). 'I will turn My hand to thee, and I will clean purge away thy dross. . . . After this thou shalt be called the city of the just, a faithful city; Sion shall be redeemed in judgment, and they shall bring her back in justice' (Isa. i. 25-27).

## XII.

### *RELIGIOUS OBEDIENCE.*

‘Obedience is better than sacrifices.’—I KINGS xv. 22.

OBEDIENCE is regarded, in the case of persons who embrace the religious life, as the true test of their religiousness; for it proves their humility, their love of God, and their desire of perfection. In practising religious obedience they submit themselves to their superiors and to the rules of their Institute, and there is no sincere submission without humility. Then in rendering this submission religious act from the love of God; if they were to obey from motives of human respect, to save appearances, to escape censure, to obtain commendation, or to stand well with their superiors or gain some favour at their hands, their submission would not be religious—it would not be what is required of them, for such motives would manifest that God is not alone, or, primarily, before their eyes. What is asked of them is obedience for the love of God, and this only is religious obedience. Moreover, by such obedience they prove their desire of perfection, both because of the sanctifying motive by which they are actuated, and because of their action in giving up their own will and submitting to

others, in order thereby to please God and practise virtue.

The world does not appreciate, or even understand, such obedience; it resembles that of the angels. Religious seem to say what God's people said to Moses when he had written the law and read it in their hearing: 'All things that the Lord hath spoken we will do, we will be obedient' (Exod. xxiv. 7); for in the commands of all their lawful superiors they recognize God's voice, and they are prepared to obey it. It is, then, seen that the obedience of religious is sanctified by the holiness of their motive in rendering it, and by their consecrating to God their liberty of action. The vow taken seals this consecration, and constitutes religious in a state, or permanent condition, of obedience; and thus and thereby are enhanced both the value and merit of their consecration and of all its consequences. It follows that, if they live in the true and fervent practice of obedience, their whole life and all they do will bear the stamp of this meritorious consecration.

When you have impressed this teaching upon your mind, should you not be glad that God has deigned to call you to consecrate your will to Him by the vow of obedience? You have dutifully made the offering, and now you are not free, if you would keep your vow, to withdraw the gift you have made, but you must as dutifully abide by what you have undertaken. You will be only too happy to abide by it, and now you wish to keep God's good pleasure before your eyes in all you do, for you are His sworn servants. It is not, however, pretended

that in all you do you are acting directly under the vow of obedience, since, as you know, your compliance is usually actuated only by the virtue, and not by the vow, of obedience, but you are always so minded that you are ever ready to do and practise whatever may be required in fulfilment of your vow. Moreover, it is clearly understood that you do not obey because only of your personal regard for your superior, or of any special momentary gain that is likely to result from your obedience, for your submission is to God, and therefore to your superiors, irrespective of their personal claims or of any personal consideration, chiefly for God's sake. This only, as we have seen, is true religious obedience. 'Whatsoever you do,' St. Paul says, 'do it from the heart, as to the Lord, and not to men' (Col. iii. 23). This is the obedience that raises your will to a conformity with the Divine will, and thereby becomes a source to you of sanctification and merit.

Obedience would, then, be faulty in its motive if a religious were to say: I obey Reverend Mother because she has such a nice way of asking us to do anything; or because she is kind and everyone likes her; or because she will show me this favour if I do what she asks. It would be faulty if the religious had in view, not so much to please God as to obtain some special office, or to receive undue consideration, or to gain some advantage over other religious in the community. If, however, the religious were to obey in a proper spirit, but only find it easier to do so by reason of the amiable qualities of the superior, and if favour was shown without that



having been the object that principally motivated the obedience, such obedience should not be considered faulty.

There is a special excellence and benefit in the vow of obedience that should impress you with a reverent appreciation of it. Excellent as are the vows of poverty and chastity, requiring you to dispossess yourselves of worldly goods and to practise purity in a single life, they yet do not embrace so wide a scope as the vow of obedience. Moreover, by this vow you consecrate to God what is especially and intimately your own, namely, your will. This consecration carries with it a fuller meritoriousness, owing to the admirable character and scope of this vow, your merit arising not only from what you actually do in compliance with your vow, but also from what you are prepared to do by reason of it.

The excellence and benefit of the vow of obedience are also seen in its relation to the state of religion, for it may be termed the real bond of every religious institute. Obedience unites all the members under one rule and authority, and is the most potent factor in bringing them to carry out the works of their Institute and to fulfil its end in the Church. It would, then, seem that by a wilful breach of the vow of obedience, not only is a blow given to authority, but one is also indirectly aimed at the life of the Institute. On the other hand, by devotedness to obedience there is manifested the truest zeal for the well-being of the Institute.

The eminence of obedience as a virtue is seen when we reflect that this is the virtue our Lord insists

upon as a test of our love: 'If you love Me, keep My commandments' (St. John xiv. 15). You have been drawn to the religious life by your love of our Lord, and you count it your happiness to belong to Him and to be dedicated to His service; and now the test of your sincerity must be your practice of obedience. You must be devoted to His will, so as to accomplish it whenever and howsoever it may be made known to you. When you obey your superiors and comply with the injunctions of the rule for His sake, your obedience is an act of love and homage offered to Him; and it is the test of your love He insists on receiving, for thus you manifest the union of your will with His. To satisfy this test you may at times have to do violence to yourself, so as to bring your wayward spirit under submission; when this is the case, and you strive to do it bravely and devotedly, you make a precious offering on the altar of obedience. If occasions occur on which the superior imposes a duty or a task that you experience difficulty in fulfilling, be assured that she has taken everything into consideration, and that she deems it best to confide the duty to you. Put away from your mind rash and unjust suspicions that she wishes to give you pain or trouble, and make to our Lord the offering of a willing compliance.

You should view obedience as being also a useful discipline. It might, in this view, be defined a discipline of the soul to protect you against your own wilfulness. Your experience has taught you to beware of this, for you have been borne on by it to

do what you have afterwards had occasion to regret. You hold it accountable for your falls and your follies. In religion there is both a curb and a guide for your wilfulness, namely, obedience. When you act from wilfulness you have reason for misgiving, but not when you make obedience the rule of your conduct ; for then the responsibility for what you do rests with your superiors, while you will be accountable only for the motive of your action and for the manner of performing it. This discipline has always been regarded as one of the most useful benefits of the religious state. While the son of Sirach was uttering the praises of wisdom, he said : ‘ Submit your neck to the yoke, and let your soul receive discipline ’ (Ecclus. li. 34) ; he invited the unlearned to gather themselves together into the house of discipline. How different was his view of discipline from that seemingly held by the religious who resents control ! Her wilfulness will undoubtedly lead her into many faults, for what must be said of her not wishing to obey the rules, and of her objecting to be kept up to observance ? Will she not manifest displeasure when required by her superior to respect certain points of the rule ? Will she not at times shirk obedience or even pretend obedience, but fail to comply with what is required ? May she not be found to influence others not to obey ? Her self-love will accompany her self-will, and she may raise the standard of revolt, and rally others to support it. The dutiful remonstrances of the superior may wound her self-love, and serve only to give fresh energy to her wilfulness. It is thus

seen that wilfulness is opposed to the spirit of religious obedience; it should therefore be combated and brought under a wise discipline. If the spirited horse does not respect the bit and the rein, harm will come both to himself and his rider.

Your appreciation of religious obedience is further increased by the consideration of its meritoriousness. 'Obedience is better than sacrifices.' If God deemed the sacrifices of the patriarchs and of the law as of 'a most sweet odour' (Lev. i.), He yet declared that He was more pleased with compliance with His ordinances. We may then say that what pleases Him is not precisely what we do, but the obedient spirit with which we do it. The effect of the vow of obedience is to bind you to obey, and this vow you have most willingly and deliberately made; your obedience is therefore more meritorious than that of persons without vows, whose obedience is without this solemn obligation, and perhaps even fitful. In rendering obedience your intention is ever to comply with the Divine will, and your reward will be adjusted according to your intentions and according to the character of your action under obedience. As you regard God as your only Master, and consider Him in your superiors, your reward for everything thus done in His service will be from Him. Your obedience will thus be a source of continual supernatural merit, and your conduct will be ennobled by your intention of ever complying with the Divine will. It would be well for you to put before yourselves not only to fulfil what is strictly of obligation in regard of your vow, but also to strive for the perfection of

obedience. Only an ungenerous spirit would weigh what is of strict obligation under the vow, and think of confining itself to this ; in religious the practice of the virtue of obedience is likewise demanded. Do not cause pain to your superior by manifesting reluctance and displeasure when required to obey, but strive always to obey joyfully, that your merit may be increased.

When you reflect, as we have now been doing, upon the excellence and utility of obedience, you will recognize its supreme necessity in the state of religion ; you will say that true religious life would be impossible without it. How, you might ask, could religious be held to tend to perfection if their life was not regulated by obedience ? and what would insure the accomplishment of the work of their Institute in the Church if obedience was disregarded ? Divisions, discontent, disorder, and a host of other evils would undermine piety, peace, and religiousness, and vocations would be lost. Should you not, then, be determined, by the love of obedience and by a faithful compliance with its demands, to keep these evils from your communities, and to maintain in them all the blessings that this virtue brings in its train both for yourselves and your Institute ?

We will now consider some of the chief qualities of religious obedience. It should be prompt, humble, and universal.

You should, in the first place, obey with promptitude and with cordial concurrence. These qualities will insure the accomplishment of what is enjoined by the superior, or by the rule, with a ready spirit

and without unnecessary delay. Your disposition may be described thus: I obey because I wish to obey, and I wish to obey at the time and in the manner required. If you cordially concur in your superior's wishes, you will display promptitude and exactness in carrying them out ; there will be a religious devotedness in your obedience. Your conduct will be very different from that of religious who mar their merit by interior murmurings and exterior indifference and carelessness, and by delaying to fulfil the command. These do not take into consideration the annoyance they probably cause to the superior, or the inconvenience resulting from their want of promptitude ; and it may also be said that their obedience is not that which they would like to see displayed towards themselves when they enjoin anything to be done. In their own case of requiring compliance they would wish their requirements to be carried out at once and as exactly as laid down. They may, indeed, do what is asked of them, but their compliance will be tardy, like that of the son who was told by his father to go and work in the vineyard, and who at first refused to do so, but who afterwards went (St. Matt. xxi. 29). Their obedience has not the quality of promptness, and it is therefore faulty as to the time of the execution of what is enjoined. In the matter of time in the execution of what is required there may be two faults, namely, a hurried, careless execution, or a slow, slovenly one ; both faults should be avoided. Compliance should be according to the nature of what is enjoined, and according to the wishes of the superior who enjoins



it. An obedient religious will strive to do what is required even in the manner that the superior herself would do it, and therefore with willingness and exactitude. There may, indeed, be exactitude where there is unwilling obedience; but the superior does not desire an exterior compliance that does not proceed from interior willingness, and the absence of this essential character of true religious obedience robs the compliance of its most meritorious quality. Promptness may be counted upon when in her obedience a religious is actuated by a sincere willingness.

In the second place, obedience should be humble. There should therefore be a respectful recognition of authority and a due submission to it. Religious obedience demands the quelling of the spirit of revolt and independence—a spirit that springs from, and is fostered by, pride. Pride would lead a religious to say: Who is she that requires me to do this? What is this I am asked to do? Do they know of whom they demand this? Obedience will not be humble when a religious permits herself to put, if only to herself, such questions as these. Nor will it be humble when a religious dislikes to have to submit herself to the requirements of the rule and to the directions of her superior. Obedience will not be humble if a religious objects to fulfil lowly offices, or desires employment that brings her into notice. St. Paul seems to condemn such conduct where he says: ‘Not minding high things, but consenting to the humble; be not wise in your own conceits’ (Rom. xii. 16). Pride would lead a religious to resent receiving the injunction of her superior, and even to

display anger when what is enjoined is not agreeable to her. Sometimes a superior has to employ special adroitness and delicacy in making known her wishes, on account of the touchiness of character of a religious; and this touchiness usually arises from pride of mind or heart. When our Divine Saviour embraced a condition of obedience, it was unto ignominy and death—‘He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death’ (Phil. ii. 8)—and He thus teaches us that humility and obedience are sister virtues, and that true obedience necessitates the practice also of humility. Since in obeying you have to submit your will to the will of another, the more humble you are the more ready and perfect will be your submission. Humility will rid you of the idea of your own excellence, and prevent you from considering in a critical and unfavourable manner the person who gives the injunction and the duty that is imposed; for these things are obstacles to religious obedience.

In the third and last place, your obedience must be universal. It is not necessary to say that it should not extend to what is wrong, or even to what is in no sense useful, or to what is foolish; for your holy rule and your superiors do not enjoin any such commands.\* When it is seen that what is enjoined is not wrong in itself or contrary to rule,

\* ‘That which is prescribed must not be evil, either intrinsically, or by reason of the precept or prohibition of a superior. Secondly, the matter of obedience must be something which is not contrary to the rule or to that state of religious life which has been professed.’—‘Elements of Religious Life,’ p. 158.

‘Non res undequaque inutiles.’—LEHMKUHL, vol. i., No. 534.

it is the duty of a religious to comply with the order given. Such should be the usual conduct to satisfy the obligations of religious obedience. Contrary to this would be to obey according to whim or convenience, to shirk duty that is distasteful, to select that which is agreeable, or to cause the superior to study unduly the predilections as to employment of the religious of her community. It is permitted to a religious to bring under the notice of the superior any honest reason for claiming relief from duty, or for being excused from accepting an obedience. This should be done respectfully and candidly, and the decision should be left to the local superior, or in graver matters to the higher superiors. To raise specious objections, to misrepresent matters, or untruly to allege inability to fulfil the duty imposed, would be contrary to the spirit and virtue of obedience. That religious obedience should be what is understood as universal is essential to the well-being of every Institute, for without such obedience it would be in the power of religious to decline to perform duty that is trying or difficult, and most important charges might remain unfulfilled; and, moreover, without it the superior would often be painfully embarrassed in arranging the work to be done by the community. It may be asked, if one religious is free to decline a certain duty for which she is competent, why should not another, and indeed all in the community, be equally free to do the same? If a religious may say: I will not do this; let someone else do it, others also might say the same. If obedience is not universal, there will be

revolt and disorder. The willingness which is necessary for the perfection of obedience supposes a readiness to fulfil any duty that is imposed; and religious should believe that the superior, in imposing it, has not only satisfied herself as to the rectitude of what is imposed, but also as to their capability to perform it.

Study, then, this important subject, for the reality and sincerity of your religious life may be gauged by the quality of your obedience. They are tested rather by your fidelity in complying with what is laid down in your holy rules, and by your religious submission to authority, than by a semblance of piety or a gravity of manner. If your obedience is prompt, humble, and universal, your spirit and conduct will be truly religious and your life meritorious. Disobedience is harmful. A religious who is guilty of it resists grace and opposes God's will. She refuses, contrary to her engagement, to submit the government of herself to her superiors, and, as she acts independently, her action may be fitful, and may also be attended by many mistakes. The injury will be not only to herself, but also to her community; for there may be an undermining of authority, a disturbance of good order, and even an interference with the success of the works undertaken by the community. What is striking in the case of disobedience is that the religious who are guilty of it are not the humble, the pious, and the edifying, but those who in several respects are unsatisfactory. By this is seen that there must be something wrong in it even when nothing serious results from it, and you

may feel certain that it cannot be accompanied with the Divine blessing. On the other hand, there result from religious obedience good order, peace, supernatural merit, and the Divine favour and blessing.

The obstacles to obedience come sometimes from yourself and sometimes from others. On your own part there are principally two obstacles, namely, self-will and pride; for it is seen that you object to control, you wish to have your own way, and you do not consider that you should be required to do certain things, and you even find fault with what is enjoined. On the part of others, there is human respect—that is, an undue influence of others, and an omission of duty owing to it. This exists when you allow yourself to be persuaded by others to disregard the injunctions of your rule and of your superior, or when you allow yourself to be controlled and advised rather by some kindred spirit in the community than by those in authority. It sometimes happens that a member of the community is kept informed of the movements of a religious, while the superior, to whom the rule requires that they should be made known, is left in entire ignorance of them. This is not as it should be.

By your vow of obedience you have undertaken certain obligations, and you should be prepared to fulfil them, and to contend with the obstacles and difficulties that stand in the way of this fulfilment. The devoted sacrifice to God of your self-love and independence has not been made without the inspiration of grace, and it will not be rendered and maintained without the aid of grace. Pray often for a true spirit of obedience, and study the lessons in this

virtue given by your Divine Model and by canonized religious. Of our Lord it is written : ' Whereas, indeed, He was the Son of God, He learned obedience ' (Heb. v. 8). Protect your vow by a sincere practical love of the virtue of obedience : place it before good works not enjoined by obedience, but proceeding from yourself ; for the Holy Ghost has declared that ' obedience is better than sacrifices.' It is a virtue that yields rich fruits of sanctification, that renders you pleasing to the Sacred Heart, and that bears great promise of present victory and future reward.



### XIII.

#### *HELL.*

‘Which of you shall dwell with everlasting burnings?’—  
ISA. xxxiii. 14.

ALTHOUGH the holy path of the religious life is far away from the broad road that leads to perdition, it is yet profitable to meditate upon the everlasting condition of those who, by a fatal folly and error, tread the way of evil and are finally cast off by God. Such meditation should impress our mind with a lively faith in the infinite character of God’s perfections, and in the inconceivable evil of mortal sin, and should also inspire us with a deep sense of reverence and awe.

We cannot pretend to depict in detail the various punishments inflicted upon the reprobate in hell, but we learn from Divine revelation, and especially from our Lord’s clear teaching, enough to fill us with dread of so fearful a lot as theirs. When St. Paul had, by a special favour, beheld the wonders of God’s reward of the just in heaven, he had no words wherewith to express what he had seen (1 Cor. ii. 9); and were we permitted to see the wonders of God’s punishment of the wicked in hell, we should find ourselves equally unable to depict them. Eye, and ear, and

heart would be overcome by the sight, an appalling sight that proclaims the rigours of God's justice—a justice that we must adore as incomprehensible and most perfect.

The doctrine of everlasting punishment in hell is one of the great fundamental articles of our holy faith. A religious should be deeply impressed by it, as well that she may be able to impart this teaching clearly and emphatically to others as that the greatness of the truth may weigh with herself and be ever before her eyes to awe her and to keep her soul in holy fear. It is written: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom' (Prov. i. 7); and again: 'They that fear the Lord keep His commandments, and will have patience even until His visitation' (Ecclus. ii. 21).

In hell there will be punishment for both body and soul. Our first consideration will be that the body will be punished by fire, and our second that the soul will be punished by the torment of the ever-gnawing worm.

We should be impressed in approaching so overwhelming a subject by the preliminary thought that God's infinite justice as well as His infinite mercy are ever regulated by His infinite wisdom; for God is infinite in all perfections, to whom it would be both blasphemous and essentially untrue to attribute any weakness, or oversight, or excess, or error, or any possible wrong. We must ever remember that God is to be equally adored in all His perfections, and that, as these are infinite, they are beyond our comprehension although not beyond our belief.

When, therefore, we adore God's perfections, the object of our adoration is incomprehensible, infinite, and eternal, transcending in boundlessness and mystery all our thought, but yet believed by faith as revealed by God, who is Truth itself. Let us, while we consider the subject of God's most terrible punishments, overshadow ourselves with this faith. What a mystery was witnessed on Calvary! God the Son promised heaven to one thief, while the other died impenitent; yet for both He shed His precious Blood and sacrificed His life. In the Holy Scriptures we read: 'Mercy and wrath quickly come from Him' (Ecclus. v. 7); in His infinite wisdom He displays the one or the other of these attributes, and He who showers His favours upon the blessed in heaven, and who punishes with unutterable woe the lost in hell, is the one same all-perfect God.

In hell, besides the loss of God, which is the greatest of all punishments, the reprobate will have to endure the suffering of fire; and we use this term with all the signification that our Lord has given it. We may with profit recall what He has said of the punishment of fire in hell. 'It is better for thee,' He said, 'to go into life maimed or lame, than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into everlasting fire' (St. Matt. xviii. 8, 9). In St. Mark it is translated 'unquenchable fire'; and our Lord goes on to say 'where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not extinguished, for every one shall be salted with fire' (St. Mark ix. 47, 48). He says also that the sentence to be passed upon the wicked shall be: 'Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire'

(St. Matt. xxv. 41). 'The Son of Man shall send His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all scandals and them that work iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire' (St. Matt. xiii. 41, 42). The execution of our Lord's wrath follows His many threats and warnings. Thus we read: 'Whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire' (St. Matt. v. 22); 'Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be cut down, and shall be cast into the fire' (St. Matt. vii. 19); 'If any one abide not in Me . . . they shall gather him up, and cast him into the fire, and he burneth' (St. John xv. 6). Lastly, our Lord tells us, in the history of the rich man and Lazarus, that when buried in hell the rich man requested that Lazarus might be sent to dip the tip of his finger in water to cool his tongue, for, he cried out, 'I am tormented in this flame' (St. Luke xvi. 24).

\* We do not pretend to fathom the mystery of Divine truths, and with firm and reverent belief we hold every doctrine of revelation proposed to us by holy Church. The existence of the everlasting punishment of hell is a truth built upon the solid and sacred foundation of God's revelation (2 Thess. i. 7, 8). Together with the rest of the articles of our Christian faith, it is as one of the beads of Divine teaching comprised in the string of articles depending upon the same Divine authority—it must stand or fall with all the rest. God cannot err either in revealing the truths that He has confided to the

\* This paragraph and the following one may be omitted if the Conference is considered too long.

Church or in administering justice—infinite Justice cannot err any more than can infinite Truth. But how shall we pretend to understand either one or the other of these Divine attributes? We may say, however, that infinite and eternal Justice acts according to its kind, accommodated to the nature of the matter with which it deals; and that the punishment of hell is proportionate to the malice and offence of the sinner, seeing that mortal sin is an outrage against an infinite and eternal Being.\* We may say, too, that as, on the one hand, God's rewards are everlasting, so, on the other, are His punishments equally everlasting; and that both one and the other are apportioned to men according to their deserts. 'Before man,' says the Holy Writer, 'is life and death, good and evil; that which he shall choose shall be given him' (Ecclus. xv. 18). We may, moreover, say that as there is no change or conversion on the part of the reprobate, who failed to avail themselves of the time of mercy, the punishment in hell endures because the guilt remains—the wicked act by which the reprobate repudiated God has not been retracted, nor has God been appeased by any true repentance (1<sup>a</sup> 2<sup>ae</sup> q. 87, art. 3). We may say, finally, that the terrible malice of the sinner's act has to be measured by the extreme littleness of him who commits it, and by the Divine Sovereignty and Greatness of Him against whom it is committed.†

\* 'Æternitas pœnæ non respondet quantitati culpæ, sed irremissibilitati ipsius.'—ST. THOMAS (see St. Mark iii. 29).

† We may note that unbelievers who gainsay this teaching have the audacity, in face of God's revelation, to entirely deny

In these days, when even children of the Church are met with who perversely wish to minimize the true meaning of this article of belief, let us cling firmly to it, and combat every specious argument brought forward against it. We have here a truth the very revelation of which is a mercy, since it keeps men from sin through a dread and fear which no other revelation could inspire. Can we conceive what the condition of the world would be, knowing what are men's vices and passions, if it was believed that there is no hell to punish man's revolt against God, religion, and virtue? As there are men who fear princes only because of their power to deprive them of life and liberty and to inflict punishment, so are there men who reverence and fear God for similar reasons, and who might not do so if there were no such reasons—that is, if they did not believe in hell. We may ask ourselves if this belief in everlasting reprobation has not had its influence upon us, too, through life; and if we consider that we can afford even now, religious as we are, to lose sight of what exercises so salutary an influence over us.

It is now time to revert to the consideration of the or to explain away its true meaning. They would also seem to lay down the limits to be observed by God's justice, and to dictate the amount of punishment that it would be right for Him to deal out to the wicked. Into how many errors unbelief leads men! All that should concern these unbelievers should be to ascertain if God has revealed this doctrine, and to learn what the Church declares to be obligatory for us to believe concerning it; and they should strive so to live as to escape these punishments, kindled only for the wicked by God's anger.



punishment of fire. You would do well to exercise your imagination in picturing to yourselves a scene of fire, though such a scene—no matter how terrible or realistic—while it will impress you with horror and dread, will not reach the reality of what the reprobate will have to suffer. Contemplate, then, in spirit an immense sea of fire, in which are plunged the reprobate, body and soul, writhing in the burning flood, encompassed by everything that can inspire horror, and enveloped in the deepest and most dismal darkness. Suppose that this sea of fire is without known limits in breadth or depth, and that there is no possible escape from it. Apply to this scene the description that the prophet *Isaias* gives of the torments prepared by God for the day of His vengeance. ‘The streams,’ he says, ‘shall be turned into pitch, and the ground thereof into brimstone, and the land . . . shall become burning pitch; night and day it shall not be quenched, the smoke thereof shall go up for ever’ (*Isa.* xxxiv. 9, 10).

Let your imagination borrow ideas and pictures from the fire that destroyed *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah*. See it coming down from heaven, filling the streets and the doorways, consuming the buildings, the inhabitants, the cattle, the trees, and the crops, rising in its fierce surges of fire until it filled the whole plain, which finally becomes a lake of fire. *St. Jude* adduces this example of God’s punishment when he writes of the fate of the fallen angels. These, he says, has God ‘reserved under darkness in everlasting chains, unto the judgment of the great day. As *Sodom* and *Gomorrhah* and the neighbour-

ing cities, in like manner . . . were made an example, suffering the punishment of eternal fire' (St. Jude i. 6, 7). Represent to yourselves this sea of flame as kindled and fanned by the just anger of God, and as depicted by Moses in his canticle, where he says: 'A fire is kindled in My wrath, and shall burn even to the lowest hell, and shall devour the earth with her increase, and shall burn the foundations of the mountains' (Deut. xxxii. 22).

The fire of hell shall accomplish its appointed work in the case of every one of the reprobate, according to the kind and number of his sins and the full measure of his guilt. As this punishment will be inflicted by a God of infinite Justice, it cannot but be just; it will be regulated most accurately as to weight, number, and measure. In every case the cup of the deserts of the wicked shall be filled up. 'Fire and brimstone and storms of winds,' says David, 'shall be the portion of their cup' (Ps. x. 7), and every kind of vice shall have its specific punishment. Then shall the wicked see how evil a thing they did in disregarding God's commandments, and in giving themselves up to unlawful pleasures, to intemperance, to enmities, to injustices, to the inordinate love of riches, and to other kinds of wickedness, and in neglecting the duties of religion. Then, instead of possessing heavenly glory and beatitude, they shall find themselves deprived of all honour and happiness; and their portion shall be to be for ever tormented in the 'exterior darkness' of everlasting punishment, deprived of even the faintest consolation, and for ever, as victims of wrath, to be where

they shall hear only 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' (St. Matt. viii. 12). It is written of the sinner: 'In the land of the saints he hath done wicked things, and he shall not see the glory of the Lord' (Is. xxvi. 10).

We note that upon occasions when man's impulse would lead him to act quickly, God seemingly delays action. With regard to this long-suffering, we must bear in mind that, because none of those who reject God's grace and mercy can possibly escape His wrath, and because His justice shall finally measure out to them, according to their deserts, a punishment that shall never end, God can afford to be patient. The sinner, while in this world, is represented as counting himself unpunished, and therefore doubting if there be a God to punish his misdeeds; but he deceives himself, for we read in Ecclesiasticus: 'Say not, I have sinned, and what harm hath befallen me? for the Most High is a patient rewarder' (v. 4). God is indeed patient and long-suffering, but for the honour of His mercy He must finally rise and put an end to the sacrilegious presumption and audacity of the sinner, and hand him over to be dealt with by His infinite justice.

We will now go on to consider who those are that shall bring upon themselves this punishment of everlasting fire. It is of faith that all who die in the state of mortal sin shall suffer everlasting punishment. A comprehensive and clear declaration of this doctrine is made by St. Paul where he says: 'Know you not that the unjust shall not possess the kingdom of God?' And he proceeds to describe the various

classes of the wicked to whom he refers (1 Cor. vi. 9, 10). 'Do not err,' he says emphatically; none of these 'shall possess the kingdom of God.' Later on, in the same Epistle from which this passage is taken, he deals with the frightful crime of sacrilege committed by a person who receives the Holy Communion unworthily, and of this sinner he says: 'He that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the Body of the Lord' (1 Cor. xi. 29).

Religious as you are, you may pause here to ask if no religious will fall under the sentence of condemnation. There have, alas! been religious who have failed to comply with the obligations of their holy calling; who have disregarded what their vow of poverty demanded of them; who, owing to sloth or a loss of piety, have come in one way or another to offend against chastity; who have given scandal by their opposition to conventual authority; who have sown discord and discontent in their community; who have lived strangers to their rule; and who have come at last to stain their soul by sacrilege. Such religious are far removed from your convents, and are very rarely met with. Their case fills you with horror and dread. Let it lead you to reflect upon our Lord's words: 'Many are called, but few are chosen.' Your surprise that such rare cases should ever be met with is lessened when you call to mind that even in the apostolic college one was found who betrayed his Lord to death. For the indevout and unobservant religious there is reason for alarm and misgiving. What, too, do you learn from the history of the holy

martyrs of Sebaste? Only thirty - nine crowns appeared in the heavens, for, lo ! one of the forty sufferers left his companions and lost his crown. You should, therefore, be persuaded of the wisdom of St. Paul's advice when he said : ' With fear and trembling work out your salvation ' (Phil. ii. 12). This advice is neglected by many, for the doctrine of eternal punishment has been preached in every age, but what salutary impression has it made ? Men remain callous and irreligious. Although sinners are invited to repent in order to escape so terrible a chastisement, they do not heed the exhortation and warning ; they rush madly into evil courses, to meet finally with the appalling consequences of their sins. Is it possible that even religious fail to realize all that this doctrine proclaims ? ' Which of you,' asks Isaias, ' shall dwell with everlasting burnings ? ' Renew, then, your faith in this vital doctrine of our holy religion, namely, that the award of the wicked who die impenitent will be punishment in the unquenchable fire ; and, moreover, behold in spirit this threat held over you by the justice of God in order ever to bind you to all that is good, and to preserve you from grievous sin.

We will now pass on to our second consideration—that in hell there is the undying worm (St. Mark ix. 43) that will ever gnaw the souls of the reprobate.

In hell the soul as well as the body will suffer its torments. In this life torture of soul may arise from violent regrets, misgivings about the future, hatred, jealousy, cruel disappointments, and such - like

troubles. These sufferings have at times been so depressing that men have even desired death as a relief from them, since they deprived them of peace and made life unbearable. In hell, after the sense of the loss of God—or, rather, in union with this sense—the chief torture of the soul will be the worm of remorse. The overwhelming sense of the soul will be, and will for ever continue to be, this: ‘I have lost heaven; I have lost it for a trifle, and through my own fault; I have lost it for ever.’ Such will be the continual cry of the damned in their everlasting despair. It offers matter for three impressive reflections.

The lost soul will, in the first place, say to itself in its anguish and now useless remorse: ‘I have lost an infinite good that was but now within my reach.’ A worldling, while he remains with his mind obscured by the love of the things of this world and of its pleasures, would scarcely use these words, because he realizes only what he sees and what he can touch and measure; but his mind will not always remain thus overclouded. The veil shall one day be raised, and he will then understand that the only true and inestimable treasure is God, the infinite Being and supreme Good, and heaven in which He is possessed for evermore. When the veil shall be raised in the next life he will perceive how great is his loss, and this knowledge will overwhelm him with indescribable chagrin and remorse, which will continue to torment him as long as he remains deprived of God and heaven—and this will be for ever. Conceive, then, if you can, the harrowing feelings that will



perpetually gnaw his soul. As a distant figure of this lost worldling, realizing all too vividly his irreparable loss, imagine a man fallen from royal wealth and magnificence, and reduced to such a miserable condition of poverty as to have to beg his bread and to feel the want of all things. What would not be the painful sense of his immense loss, and how keenly he would lament it! He has, however, still something left—perhaps a strong arm, and talents that he may yet turn to account. The reprobate soul sustains an incomparably greater loss—it loses the Sovereign Good and the everlasting kingdom of heaven, to have instead sovereign, everlasting, and indescribable misery, and absolutely nothing to relieve or comfort it.

Or represent to yourselves an ambitious man who has used every endeavour and intrigue, and put himself to great labour and fatigue with harrowing of the mind, to secure for himself a certain position or rank. Suddenly, when he believes that success is about to crown his efforts, he finds that a rival has supplanted him, and that all his labour has been absolutely fruitless. What bitter anguish and disappointment he feels! What, however, are his regrets in comparison with those experienced by the reprobate soul that sees it has lost heaven, with its full beatitude, its rivers of joy, its torrent of pleasure, its throne of glory, and all the riches that are in the city of God?

The lost soul will grow wild with fury and remorse at so great and irreparable a loss. The Psalmist describes its feelings in these words: 'The wicked

shall see and shall be angry, he shall gnash with his teeth and pine away' (Ps. cxi. 10).

Then shall be realized the difference of the award apportioned to the man who was rich and wicked and the man who was poor but patient and virtuous. The man glutted with riches and pleasures in this world, who neglected to serve and bless God who gave him all things, and who failed to share his superabundant means with the needy, shall see Lazarus enriched with heavenly glory and delights, while he himself, dwelling in the realms of everlasting fire, shall be deprived of everything that could afford the least satisfaction or comfort, and shall, at the same time, experience every kind of want and torment. In vain shall he beg that Lazarus (St. Luke xvi. 24) or some messenger from God may come and soothe his parched tongue, if only with one drop of water. 'The wicked shall see and shall be angry, he shall gnash with his teeth and pine away.'

No tongue can depict the extreme desolation of heart and spirit and the hopeless despair of the wicked abandoned souls. The infinite good they fain would possess has passed for ever from their grasp. They have now nothing comforting to look forward to, no alleviation of their misery to expect, no gain, even, from all their sufferings and anguish—for these shall never have an end, and they are not for correction, but for punishment. The waves of the fiery deep break on no shore, however distant, and they know no calm. This is the awful retribution they have evoked, invited, and brought upon themselves, and they have now no power to stay it and turn it

back or to escape from it. They withdrew themselves from the way of salvation and the sphere of mercy, and now God has cast them from Him in His anger. 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into everlasting fire' (St. Matt. xxv. 41). The irrevocable sentence has been pronounced and has been given effect to. The heavens, once propitious, once inviting to repentance, but then unheeded, perhaps even blasphemed, have now become as brass (Deut. xxviii. 23). They have now closed for ever over their head. No Divine Saviour will ever descend into those regions of reprobation; in hell there is no redemption. The damned will, therefore, for ever dwell in the abyss of everlasting misery and in the sea of unquenchable fire (Ps. xlviii.). 'The wicked shall see and shall be angry, he shall gnash with his teeth and pine away.'

The lost soul laments, in the second place, that, for a mere trifle, and through its own fault, it has deprived itself of the everlasting possession of the Sovereign Good. On this account, too, shall the worm of remorse gnaw it for ever. We can in this life bear with misfortune that does not result from our own action or want of action or bring disgrace upon us, but we feel overwhelmed with chagrin if we have brought it upon ourselves by unpardonable folly or imprudence; the bitter thought of it tortures our mind. What, then, must be, in the case of the reprobate, the torment of mind and the gnawing thoughts that ever succeed one another in the pit of their endless sufferings? The lost soul says: 'Once I could have been saved, but now I never can be. When such and such a priest, relation, or friend gave

me that wise warning and counsel, there was still time for me to enter upon the way of salvation. I could have done it when I saw others approaching the holy sacraments, and I held back. I could have done it during that retreat or mission. I could then, I cannot now, and I shall never again have the opportunity of doing it. What possessed me to cause me to persevere in those evil or negligent ways? I scorned or ridiculed the path of humility, piety, purity, temperance, meekness, and charity trodden by the true servants of God, but I never enjoyed real peace. What an error, and what folly on my part! Theirs was the path of wisdom, and they now possess the happy portion of the Saints, while I, in this place of torments, am awarded the just punishment of my sins. They are comforted, I am tormented' (St. Luke xvi. 25).

Then, according to the Book of Wisdom, shall the wicked confess in their despair: 'We have erred from the way of truth . . . we wearied ourselves in the way of iniquity. . . . What hath pride profited us?' Such are the bitter cries and unending moanings of the reprobate' v. 6-14). The lost soul experiences intense and everlasting torture because it sees, too, that by its own act it bartered the favour of God and its heavenly inheritance for some miserable object or trifling gain, and that, through its own fault, it has brought on itself the just punishment measured out to it by the God whom it outraged by its wicked conduct.

The ever-enduring character of the punishment will put the stamp of despair upon all the other

tortures of the lost soul, so as to make it say, in the third place : ‘ I have lost heaven, and lost it for ever.’ This thought, ever present to it, will torment it with a gnawing agony, and cause it to send up endless cries of useless lamentation and rage directed against itself and its everlasting prison of fire. When, in this world, a man meets with misfortune or suffering, his first thought is about its duration, and it comforts him somewhat to consider that it will end at some time or other, and comforts him much if he sees that it will end soon. In hell, however, the lost soul cannot look forward to death to end its sufferings, and there is no possibility of annihilation. There is some finality in the case of criminals under punishment in this world, but none in hell. There time has ceased to be, and eternity has no end, so that the reprobate cannot say that he has ever lessened his sufferings even by an hour. ‘ Always ; for ever ’ ; this is the only reckoning known in hell, and every thought of it, as an undying worm, gnaws the soul of the lost. This is the punishment inflicted by an Eternal God. The time to show mercy and to spare has gone by for ever, and in hell is the eternity in which to mete out to the wicked all the terrible punishments which they despised when they might have escaped them. There in hell will they recognise how true that was which was said : ‘ God is not mocked ’ (Gal. vi. 7). How, forsooth, could the God of infinite sovereignty, greatness, and goodness suffer Himself to be mocked by His own creatures and still continue to be revered as God ? We read in Isaias how God vindicates His honour : ‘ I have trampled on them in My indignation, and

have trodden them down in My wrath' (Isa. lxiii. 3).

You have in these few considerations concerning the terrible punishment prepared for the wicked who fall under the wrath of God enough matter to impress you with a lively faith in the evil of sin and the sad folly of the persistent sinner. While seeking ever to walk with fidelity in the holy path of your vocation, which will lead you surely to the realms of everlasting glory, may your faith in the everlasting punishment of the wicked inspire you with a salutary fear to strengthen your feet in pursuing that holy path, and to keep you from all the ways of evil. Turn to the Cross of your Saviour for shelter and safety, appeal to the Sacred Heart for mercy and perpetual aid. In your firm trust in the Divine Spouse of your soul say with St. Paul: 'I know whom I have believed' (2 Tim. i. 12). Ask Him to speak to you in comforting words: 'Say to my soul, I am thy salvation' (Ps. xxxiv. 3). Be assured that, if only you believe, and hope, and love, and serve God faithfully in the sphere in which His providence has so graciously placed you, you will find in Him, not the inexorable Judge to condemn you to that everlasting fire and undying worm, but the loving Father to invite you to sit down with His elect in His everlasting blissful kingdom. Repent, then, sincerely of whatever has been remiss in the past, and beg God to enable you by piety and dutifulness to make your path in life more secure, your works more meritorious, and your crown more glorious.



## FIFTH DAY.

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### XIV.

#### *MEDITATION.*

‘I will meditate on Thy commandments, and I will consider Thy ways.’—Ps. cxviii. 15.

OUR Divine Lord, who is our Teacher and Model in all that is good, has set us an example in the duty of both vocal and mental prayer. Some of His prayers have been recorded by the Evangelists, who also tell us of His custom of retiring into solitary places to make the prayer of God (St. Luke vi. 12). Following in His sacred footsteps, the Saints and devout Christians of every condition of life, and in every age of the Church, have given themselves to prayer and meditation, and have derived therefrom rich fruits and abundant consolations. This is a practice common to all Religious Orders, and religious are taught to regard the morning meditation as a most important exercise with which to begin every day.

You would do well during your retreat to renew your appreciation of this holy exercise, and to amend any faults that may have crept into your fulfilment of this religious duty. You will acknowledge the

value of meditation when you have regarded it as a fruitful source of knowledge, of wisdom, and of fervour.

The teaching of our holy faith and of the many lessons imparted by our Divine Saviour removes darkness, obscurity, and uncertainty from our mind, and conveys to the soul light from Truth itself. We rightly regard knowledge as the light of the soul. Our mind must, as it were, draw back the curtains and open the windows to admit this light, and then we shall be enlightened, and the knowledge we thus and then acquire will become one of the richest treasures of the soul. The knowledge you acquire through the practice of daily meditation is various, practical, and thorough; it makes you better acquainted with Divine mysteries and designs, with the ways of mercy and grace, with the life and teaching of our Lord, with the wonders of God's love and providence, with His claims upon your worship and service, and with the duties of your state of life. Such knowledge impressed upon the mind throws a light upon much that in your present and passing condition of existence is shrouded in mystery, and tends to draw you to God and things eternal, in the holy path of religion, grace, and virtue. Love, then, and seek this light of so salutary a knowledge; it is the first fruit of the practice of meditation.

Wisdom may be described as a proper using of right knowledge. It is not enough to have knowledge, we must also turn it to good account. Meditation does not consist only in storing up profitable knowledge and holy thoughts; it moves the

will to love the lessons which are the subject of the mind's study and investigation, and to desire to put them into practice ; it draws the heart in the path of holy living that is opened up by this knowledge and these lessons. The practical lover of Divine truth does not remain inactive, for our Lord has said : ' Blessed are they who hear the word of God, and keep it ' (St. Luke xi. 28). Because meditation leads us to holy action and to pursue a wise conduct, we describe its second fruit as wisdom. This desirable fruit will be yours if you love and practise daily meditation. We seem to see it promised in the first chapter of the Book of Ecclesiasticus, where the writer says : ' To whom hath the discipline of wisdom been revealed and made manifest ? and who hath understood the multiplicity of her steps ? There is one most high Creator Almighty. . . . He created her in the Holy Ghost . . . and He poured her out upon all His works, and upon all flesh according to His gift, and hath given her to them that love Him ' (Ecclus. i. 7-10). In meditation wisdom is your counsellor, to guard you against the impulses of passion, and against the sloth or waywardness of nature, and to lead you to correspond with grace, and to walk in the footsteps of Christ and the Saints. Since wisdom is to be sought as money, and dug for as a treasure (Prov. ii. 4), you should earnestly desire this second fruit of meditation.

The third fruit is fervour, which may be described as that spirit or impulse which carries you on, with desire and determination, to accomplish what is seen to be wise and beneficial ; and which enables you

with earnestness and generosity to undertake labour, to endure opposition, to overcome obstacles, and to employ whatever means may be deemed necessary to attain success in doing this. You perceive, then, that fervour begets interest and zest in the practical work of your perfection, and that it cannot but be an effectual antidote to that spirit of sloth, inactivity, and discouragement which causes the inoperativeness of grace, the wasting of opportunities of making progress, and the spiritual languor witnessed in religious who are indevout and unobservant. Go to your daily meditation as to the fountain of earnest piety that will satisfy and sustain your soul, and enable you to run in the path of duty, and to maintain your devotedness in seeking ever to accomplish the Divine will. Tasting this rich fruit of meditation, you may say with David: 'O God, my God, to Thee do I watch at break of day; for Thee my soul hath thirsted. . . . I will meditate on Thee in the morning, because Thou hast been my helper; and I will rejoice under the covert of Thy wings; my soul hath stuck close to Thee' (Ps. lxii).

Renew, then, your appreciation of the solid spiritual value of meditation, seeing that it is, as we have seen, the fruitful source of a salutary knowledge, of a disciplinary wisdom, and of a holy fervour. Desire these fruits, and therefore be resolved to be faithful and assiduous in making your morning meditation. This exercise has its place in the process of your spiritual advancement, and it cannot be systematically omitted without spiritual detriment. Without meditation you will be wanting in religious know-

ledge ; without it much of the teaching of the word of God will remain undigested and only partially recognized ; and since the heavenly doctrine, pondered over in meditation, appeals to your affections and produces devout sentiments of worship, love, and dutifulness, and since it moreover captivates the will which forthwith seeks to bring your conduct into keeping with its lessons, how great will be your loss if you neglect meditation !

You may here strengthen your appreciation of this religious exercise by reflecting that it has in every age been the practice of God's devout servants. We read in Holy Scripture how *Enoch* walked with God (*Gen. v. 22*), and how *Isaac* gave himself to meditation (*Gen. xxiv. 63*). *David* describes the just man as meditating on the law of God day and night (*Psalms i. 2*), and he tells us of his own frequent meditations. In the history of the Christian Church you have the example set by the devout *Anchorites*, the *Doctors*, holy *Virgins*, and *Saints* of every condition ; and you see how the *Founders of Religious Orders* have prescribed this holy practice for their children, and you, moreover, know the importance attached to it in your own Institute. All this should lead you to prize meditation.

Our next consideration shall be the manner of performing this exercise. There are religious who say they cannot meditate. We might ask if they understand what is really meant by meditation ; for when we examine the matter we find the process so simple and so reasonable. Let us now consider it.

Meditation has its different stages of development,

and progress must be made from the bare consideration of the matter to the practical resolutions to which this finally leads. We need not here dwell upon the acts elicited in the immediate preparation which dispose the soul to make the meditation well. These acts should be made with recollection and piety.

The first part of the meditation is devoted to reflection upon the subject proposed for consideration. The subject is recalled by memory, or by reading over the points given in the book of meditations, and it should be thoroughly and leisurely examined, so that the mind may be impressed with the truth it discloses. In the case of some subjects a picture may be put before the mind for study. Dwell upon the scene, see the excellence of the virtue, admire the ways of God, examine the meaning of the passage, reflect upon the Divine dispensation, see the effects produced, and look at the various aspects of the subject. David seems to declare that this is what he purposed doing when he said: 'I will meditate upon Thy commandments, and I will consider Thy ways.' These considerations are the groundwork of the benefit to be derived from this holy exercise, and it is important to keep the mind from ruminating upon any subject not connected with them. The matter for meditation has its own particular scope, and the reflections now made should not be directed beyond this limit. In this part of the meditation the holy light of truth falls upon the prayerful mind and makes a salutary impression; and now play must be given to the emotions created.



You should, after your reflections, proceed to give expression to your affections according to their kind.

These affections are various, and they should be entertained and expressed naturally and freely under the impulse of the grace of the meditation. Not to draw out the conference to unreasonable length, it must suffice to instance only a few examples. Sometimes, moved by the consideration of the Divine Greatness and other infinite perfections, you will adore these, and give utterance to your admiration, praise, and love; or, considering God's bountiful providence, you will give vent to your feelings of gratitude, and express the sense of your own unworthiness of so much bounty on His part towards you. Contemplating the various events of our Lord's life, you will cast yourself at His feet in adoration, and admire the wonders of the Divine condescension and goodness; you will, moreover, express your joy at the glory His life gave to God and at the blessings flowing to men from His works, and declare your love and devotedness. Studying the virtues of our Lord, our Blessed Lady, and the Saints, you will admire them, and thank God for the lessons they teach you; or, considering the mysteries of the sacred Passion and kindred subjects, or the ingratitude of sinners, you will add to other sentiments those of compassion, sympathy, and indignation; or, finally, meditating upon the duties of your state, you will thank God for your vocation, and you will express your desire to love it and to be faithful to its requirements. It may be said that the affections elicited in this part of the meditation should, according to the

character of the subject, be those of worship, admiration, praise, joy, thanksgiving, hope, fear, love, confidence, or sorrow. If the mind has been properly impressed by the subject under consideration, they should proceed from the soul without constraint, easily and spontaneously. If these affections are allowed expression, and are elicited with fervour for a few moments, it will tend very much to the making of a devout and profitable meditation.

The next steps in the meditation are those of examination and application. You now come to the practical stage, and begin by examining what teaching is disclosed by the subject. You study the lessons contained in what you have been considering to learn what you should believe and what you should do. Perhaps you learn that your previous ideas of the subject were incomplete or erroneous, and you therefore improve them or correct them. You apply the lessons to yourself, to see how the teaching should particularly affect your conduct, to consider what you have to learn for your guidance, and to discover in what way you should put in practice the lessons disclosed by the subject. In this stage of the meditation you strive to adopt right views and principles, and desire to turn to good account the light you have received.

Then will follow reflection upon your past and present conduct, which you will examine by the light of the lessons you have learned. Have you, as a matter of fact, acted rightly? Have you striven to please God, and to fulfil the obligations of your state? Have you profited by the blessings bestowed upon

you, and turned to good account the means of sanctification placed in your way? Have you really loved humility, charity, obedience, and the other virtues, and have you striven to practise them? Have you borne with patience the crosses and contradictions you have met with? How does your conduct compare with what you have studied in the life of our Lord, His holy Mother, and the Saints?

This practical examination will be succeeded by regrets and good resolutions. You will humble yourself on account of your faults and shortcomings, and grieve that you have not corresponded more faithfully with grace. You will ask God to pardon you for your sins, for your ingratitude, and for your neglect; and you will close your meditation by studying what amendment may be needed, and by making good practical resolutions for the future. In doing this you will try to foresee any particular occasion likely to occur of putting your resolutions into practice, and you will make provision for it. Finally, you will address fervent prayers to God for His help and protection, and in particular for grace to keep your good resolutions.

Such is the manner of making a really profitable meditation. How thankful you should be that time is provided for you every day to perform this holy exercise! How valuable a help it is in the spiritual life! We have already seen that meditation should be fruitful in knowledge, wisdom, and fervour. You will now be all the more convinced of this because of the holy mysteries, and the teaching and example of our Lord and the Saints which it brings before

you for consideration; because of the light and guidance resulting from studying such holy subjects; because of the communion with God which takes place while you elicit so many pious affections; and because of the practical service which meditation renders in directing and correcting your conduct, helping to save you from many falls and faults, and to renew you daily in fervour and dutifulness.

It should be evident to you that you would be at fault if you were, without sufficient reason, to omit your morning meditation. To omit it systematically would manifest a serious misapprehension of duty. How many truths, and how many words and lessons of our Lord, are not well understood because men do not meditate on them! How many religious remain in the same groove of tepidity because they omit their meditation or make it badly! Let not sloth or indifference deprive you of this morning exercise, or lead you to go through it without attention or interest. God will reward fidelity in performing it. Who shall say the amount of good meditation does in religious communities? It is as a spiritual magnet drawing the soul to God, to virtue, and to dutifulness. The time devoted to this exercise is precious, and not to be wasted.

Let me now warn you against what would be faulty in the manner of making your meditation. You will not always feel the same attraction for this duty, but this should not discourage you, or cause you to disregard the benefits to be derived even then from meditation. Do not strain the mind, do not permit irritation; and if the mind seems fatigued, it

would sometimes be well to spend the time in reading, taking care, however, to suspend the reading in order to elicit pious affections and to make application of the lessons suggested. At times you may find meditation monotonous; do not allow this to dissuade you from making it, for even though you may not perceive the fruits it yields, there will yet be some, and the fulfilment of the duty will not be without its blessing. Beware of a want of earnestness, and strive to check any wandering of the thoughts to useless subjects; and whatever difficulty you may experience in the course of your meditation, strive to draw some lesson from it. Beware also of confusion and purposelessness in making it, and do not permit yourself easily to depart from the plan or order usually followed in making it.

By making your meditation, and striving to make it well, you invite the Divine inspirations. If God speaks to the heart of His servants, it is most likely to be when they engage in devout prayer and seek to study His ways and His will. This is what you do during your morning meditation: 'I will meditate upon Thy commandments, and I will consider Thy ways.' That you may be faithful in fulfilling this holy duty, pray to God to bestow upon you a love of mental prayer; you will then fulfil it with affection and, let us hope, also with fervour. These are dispositions that ensure fidelity. The results will be those that we have already seen. You will be able to say with David: 'I have run the way of Thy commandments, when Thou didst enlarge my heart'

(Ps. cxviii. 32); for as your mind will be further enlightened by the Divine truths, your will also will be drawn ever more to the Divine will, the accomplishment of which, while it brings the soul happiness in this land of its exile, will secure your everlasting reward in the kingdom of your Father (St. Matt. vii. 21).



## XV.

### *DEVOTEDNESS TO THE CHURCH.*

‘Seek to abound unto the edifying of the Church.’—I COR. xiv. 12.

RELIGIOUS should be distinguished by a sincere spirit of devotedness to the interests of the Church, for they would not manifest true love of our Lord unless they entertained also a practical love of His Church. Their holy vocation, bestowed on them as a token of God’s predilection, gives them a special place in the Church, and, moreover, demands of them to devote themselves to some particular work in it. The accomplishment of that work is required by the Divine will, and should, therefore, elicit their constant and untiring zeal and effort.

It is, then, your duty to recognize that the special character of your vocation does not separate you from the general body of the Church, but gives you a privileged place in it. Your happiness, like that of other members of the Church, is in being the adopted children of God and members of the mystical Body of Christ. Call to mind the admirable union that existed in the Church in the days of the Apostles. It is written of the first faithful: ‘All

they that believed were together, and had all things common' (Acts ii. 44). ' . . . And them multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul' (Acts iv. 32). Although the discipline of the Church may have changed since those days of primitive fervour, her spirit and character remain the same. Therefore, although as religious you live apart in your communities, you should not on that account dissociate yourselves from the rest of the faithful in what concerns the glory of God and His becoming service by all His creatures, or in what interests His Church, which is the kingdom of God in this world. It is expected of you, as religious, to have eminently the true Christian character, to have but one heart and one soul with the rest of the faithful, to be animated with the same spirit, and to be zealous in the same holy cause. Except you have this fellow-feeling and bond in Christ with them, you may be tempted to regard yourselves as set apart from them, and even in some way superior to them, whereas you should not contend for distinctions and superiority; and whereas we are all one in Christ, and this spirit and bond of unity have been created by the sacred character of Christ's relationship with us and of ours with Him.

In your love of the Church and its interests, keep before your mind what our Lord's love of it was. St. Paul says: 'Christ loved the Church, and delivered Himself up for it' (Eph. v. 25). Be, then, persuaded that since our Lord deigned to deliver Himself up to death for the Church, for you, and for all without distinction, it is but little that you, in imitation of

Him, should devote yourselves within the scope of your vocation to the interests, spiritual and temporal, of His Church. Be willing to take as addressed to yourselves the Apostle's exhortation: 'Seek to abound unto the edifying of the Church.'

You are not of the number of those who form an erroneous notion of what the religious life is, of those who think they should be relieved of every care, and be free to give themselves to devotion according to their inclination. The character of the religious life is more sterling, practical, and self-denying than this. You know that obedience marks out for you various duties and useful works which are not left to your caprice, but which are to be accomplished according to the spirit of your Institute and the directions of your superiors. If you are pious religious you will be zealous for the faithful fulfilment of the duties, and for the success of the works, enjoined and contemplated as proper to your Institute. Thus will you show yourselves in a real and active way children of God and members of His Church. The reality of your character as such should be manifested especially by your action in seeking to promote God's glory and the good of His Church, and by the interest and zeal you feel and display in all that concerns these great and noble objects.

God cannot Himself be indifferent to what affects His glory. We read how He upbraided His people with their disregard of Him in these words: 'The son honoureth the father, and the servant his master; if, then, I be a father, where is My honour?' (Mal. i. 6). He has created angels and men to give glory to Him.

What effort, then, should you make to do this? You should, according to the scope of your vocation and the measure of your grace, labour to give glory to God by being devout in your own life and by devotedness to the work in the Church that you are called upon to do.

I need not here dwell upon the effort you should make for your own sanctification. No work you can offer to God will be pleasing to Him if at the same time you neglect this first duty (1 Thess. iv. 3). Let not any pretence of the demands of charity lead you to neglect it. You have embraced the religious life to devote yourselves in a special way to the fulfilment of this duty. Of what avail will it be to seek to do good to others if you do not at the same time correct in yourself what is faulty? Can you expect that God will be pleased with praise from hearts that are cold, or that He will accept gifts from hands that are not holy?

We pass on to consider that you should devote yourselves with zeal to the good works in the Church entrusted to your Institute. You have been taught to regard the Church as the mystical Body of Christ. St. Paul says: 'He is the head of the body, the Church' (Col. i. 18); and also as the very Spouse of Christ, according to the teaching of the same Apostle: 'Christ also loved the Church, and delivered himself up for it.' Moreover, you look upon the Church as the kingdom of God in this world, as our Lord in several of His parables declares it to be (St. Matt. xiii. 24, etc.). You are not outside of this mystical body, but members of it, and you must therefore fulfil the functions of members. And when

Christ espoused the Church, He included you in those espousals; you must therefore be true to Him and work for Him with a loving devotedness. Moreover, when by holy Baptism you were admitted into the kingdom of God, it became your duty to take up your appointed position in that kingdom, to abide by its laws, and to labour for its ends; these ends tend to the welfare of mankind, to the sanctification and salvation of men.

The longer you contemplate the Church—her foundation, position, functions, and mission—the more are you forced to admire her, and the more do you become convinced that her work and action, in the fulfilment of her mission in the world, are beneficial, ennobling, and continual. While not unmindful of the temporal needs, sufferings, and miseries of men, she keeps chiefly in view to prepare them for their eternal destiny, and she never folds her arms or looks upon her holy task as accomplished. By voice and action, never wearied, she ever proceeds with her mission; for, much as she has already done, she knows that yet much more has to be done, and her mission is to every generation of men. As new generations spring up, and as fresh calls are made upon her charity and sympathy, she is ever at hand; for God has created her to be in the world, to a great extent, His instrument and agent for the welfare of mankind to the end of time.

The Church, as a body, is made up of individuals; and as everyone among you is one of the many individuals who constitute it—‘because,’ says St. Paul, ‘we are members of His body’ (Eph. v. 30)—so

everyone, according to her respective calling, should do her share of the work of the Church in the world. Within the fold of the Church, too, are incorporated various societies and institutes devoted to every kind of good work, and employed in promoting the noble ends Divinely entrusted to her, and it is your privilege to belong to one of these institutes. It therefore behoves everyone among you devotedly to seek to procure, within the scope of your calling, the glory of God and the welfare of mankind; and this you will do if only you are sincerely attached to your Institute and zealous for the success of the good works entrusted to it. Where so much has to be done, and where the works are so pleasing to God, it would be sad to meet with idle or useless servants, or with such as misdirect their zeal. It may be well to warn you against being drawn into pursuits outside the scope of your vocation; for sometimes superiors meet with religious whom they can with difficulty keep up to duty, but who are ever ready to do what others may demand of them. Just as some are to be met with who are so subservient to their secular friends that these have only to hint a wish and the religious eagerly comply with it, and in doing so brush aside such 'minor considerations' as the permission of their superior and other obligations of their state, so are there to be found others who are all zeal and activity when there is question of what is not to the purpose, but remiss and apathetic in their own proper work. Zeal, to be meritorious, must be wisely directed. When it is displayed in works enjoined by duty, your labour and fidelity will

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be amply rewarded, not only by a pleasing measure of success and the approval of conscience, but also by everlasting blessings. St. Paul says: 'In doing good let us not fail, for in due time we shall reap, not failing' (Gal. vi. 9).

Consider now, more in particular, the kind of spirit by which you should be animated, and what interest you should take in the work of the Church in the world. You should rejoice in the triumphs of grace effected through her ministry and in the success of her mission; you should be consoled by the conversion of sinners and the spread of the faith; you should thank God for the multiplication of various charitable and pious institutions, and for the happy fruits yielded by missions and retreats; and you should be interested in whatever furthers the exaltation of the Church throughout the world, and in the well-being of the Sovereign Pontiff. You are not called upon personally to promote all of these good works, but you should manifest your interest in them by at least desiring their success and praying for it, and by rejoicing in it when accomplished by others. Then will your thoughts be less centred in yourselves, and your heart be expanded with a truer charity, so as to beat in unison with the hearts of the devout in many lands, who, in a practical manner and in so many ways, are seeking to promote the glory of God, the salvation of souls, and the welfare of mankind.

You may take part in furthering these noble ends, in the first place, by prayer. If missionaries are sometimes surprised at the wonderful success of

their labours, and studying, as we may say, the relations between cause and effect have to acknowledge that they themselves have done but little to achieve it, may we not attribute it, under the merciful providence of God, to the prayers offered up everywhere in the Church for the success of missionary labour? In other good works, too, may not the blessing that has attended them be referred rather to a similar cause than to the personal effort of those who have promoted them? Help, then, the action of the Church in fulfilling her noble mission by your prayers. You may not know in what manner or where the answer will come to them, but faith tells you that God's ears are open to the prayers of His servants, and that He will answer them according to His wisdom and goodness. By your prayers you will have a share in the merit of the good work that they assist, and a reward for the piety that prompts them.

You should, in the second place, manifest your interest in the work of the Church by word and example. In both these ways you can help others and spread the flame of charity. A truly devout servant of God wins others in these ways to God's service—to duty, virtue, zeal, and piety. You may help others by word, by instruction, and timely advice, and, according to your opportunities, by encouragement or warning. You may also instigate others to take a practical interest in the cause of religion and of the Church. How many persons there are who have no initiative, but who readily take up a good work when they are encouraged to do so! How many there are who seem blind to

their follies, and who change their ways when the folly of them is pointed out in a discreet manner to them ! How many, too, there are who fail to fulfil what duty demands of them because there is no kindly voice to instruct them ! Give your help, then, when occasion arises, to instigate and direct others by your words. Your edifying example should lend powerful aid to your words, and by this happily religious are ever preaching lessons of piety and virtue. By the character of the life you lead, by fidelity to religious observance, and by prudent reserve, you have among the faithful a place of respect and honour, and it becomes you to maintain it ; then will you edify the body of the faithful, and be an example to them in everything that is good.

You prove, in the third place, your practical interest in the success of the mission of the Church in the world by useful work. Religious Orders and Institutes have been raised up in every age, according to the needs of the Church, to initiate or carry on special works. To sing the praises of God, to educate the young, to ransom captives, to preach repentance, to instruct the ignorant, to nurse the sick, to take care of the aged and the orphan, and to spread the Gospel, are some of the glorious works to which they were created to devote themselves. Your own Institute takes its place among the rest in labouring for some of these noble and useful ends. It behoves you, therefore, to be animated with its spirit, and to show devotedness to the particular works it proposes to its members to accomplish.

You have, perhaps, to educate the young and to

prepare them for that sphere in life marked out for them. Have you reflected that some among them may, in course of time, become religious, and that many will be mothers of a Christian family? What a solid and practical piety and knowledge they should acquire under your care and tuition! If they fail to acquire these through your fault or neglect, how serious your responsibility will be; but if you are instrumental in their acquisition of them, how rich will be your reward!

You have to impart to the young under your care four kinds of training. There must be, first of all, religious training. You are the mouthpieces of the Church to impart gradually all the religious instruction your pupils need that they may know the doctrines of revelation and be prepared for the holy sacraments; and it belongs to you to teach them the duty of prayer and the meaning of the various services, seasons, and devotions of the Church. You have, secondly, to impart moral training. Your pupils must do something more than learn the teachings of the faith, they must also be taught humility, obedience, modesty, self-respect, candour, truthfulness, dutifulness, and self-restraint. In other words, they must be taught to love and respect virtue, to show consideration for others, and to avoid vanity, idleness, and selfishness. This training will be successful if accompanied by sympathy and kindness. The third kind of training is the imparting of useful secular knowledge, including such accomplishments as are looked for in the sphere of society to which your pupils belong. Your effort to impart this knowledge must be conscientious and

earnest, and the superiors should select for every branch of tuition teachers who are in all respects competent. Lastly, you have to give your pupils suitable social training, namely, training in good manners. This is not without its importance, and success in imparting it will give much satisfaction to parents, and help to maintain your name for successful tuition.

How important all this training is! What an amount of devotedness it demands! Grand opportunities of doing good lie before you. The mind of the young is impressionable. You have, in conjunction with Divine grace, to help to form the character of those who come under your care. Their home surroundings may tend to make them worldly, vain, and even unchristian, and their own tendencies may lead them to be thoughtless, vain, wayward, and selfish; but the training you give them should be a corrective of these faults. On your part there should be zeal and prayer. You must ask God to bless your efforts.

See the propagandists of error and the workers of evil, how busy they are! What havoc they work in the souls of men, for which Christ died! You are banded together in a holy cause: let it not suffer through your want of devotedness, but seek rather to sustain and promote it by fidelity to your Institute and zeal for the success of its works. Thus may you be said to seek to abound unto the edifying of the Church; and while you bring honour to your Institute, you will also win many blessings for yourselves, and lay up to yourselves treasures untold in the kingdom of heaven (St. Matt. vi. 20).

## XVI.

### *CONFESSION.*

‘If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity.’—I ST. JOHN i. 9.

WE come now to speak of that holy sacrament which our Lord in His wisdom, goodness, and mercy instituted for the cleansing of the soul from any sins committed after Baptism. Just as perfectly as Baptism washes away original sin does Penance wash away actual sin in the case of those who approach it in proper dispositions. In both cases the operation is Divine, effected through the means of a sacrament Divinely instituted (St. Matt. xxviii. 19; St. John xx. 23). If only we confess our sins with true sorrow they will be forgiven, and our souls will be cleansed. We thank God for this boon existing in His Church, displaying to every generation of men the riches of His mercy, and opening to them a way of reconciliation. May there ever be priests at hand to fulfil this ministry of mercy!

The frequent reception of the holy sacrament of Penance is strongly recommended by the Holy Fathers and Doctors of the Church and by spiritual writers. Religious, as a rule and when possible, go to confession once a week, for they desire the bless-



ings and benefits it confers. In the first place, no matter how few or how slight their faults may be, they wish to repent of them, and to be absolved from them through the direct efficacy of this sacrament. They have a firm and constant faith in this Divine institution, and in the absolute truth of Christ's promise to His Church: 'Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them'; and therefore they readily and thankfully avail themselves of so useful and necessary a sacrament. In the second place, they recognize the help this sacrament is to purity of conscience, and to preserve them from falling back into sin. Not only is it so because of the special graces it imparts, but also because of the acts of repentance, sorrow, and purpose of amendment that must be elicited every time they prepare themselves to approach it. Their good resolutions are every such time renewed, and a fresh impulse is given to fidelity and fervour in fulfilling their duty to God and the obligations of their religious calling. In the third place, the devout reception of the sacrament of Penance disposes the soul for piety, prayer, and Holy Communion. A certain remissness is likely to manifest itself in these religious duties when frequent confession is dispensed with; but when the conscience is often cleansed, when hatred of sin is frequently and sincerely renewed, and when fervour as often receives a fresh impulse in the sacrament of Penance, grace dispels tepidity and exercises a holy influence on the soul. Lastly, religious recognize the value of this sacrament as a constant preparation for a happy death, for it removes sin, curbs evil

inclinations, and tends to create good dispositions.

The recognized benefits of this sacrament are such that even the tepid would not like to be altogether deprived of it. They know that if they seldom or never went to confession they would become hopelessly indifferent, that their spiritual life might become extinct, and that their salvation would be jeopardized, so they approach the sacrament at the usual times. Their tepidity, however, lessens the benefit they might derive from it, and there are but few fruits of amendment. It may safely be asserted that if religious do not value the sacrament of Penance, there is something wrong somewhere. Are they attached to some particular sin? Are they neglecting the duties of their office? Have they become unobservant? Are there ties of particular friendship that enslave them? Are they falling away from the love of their vocation?

The excellence of the sacrament remains ever the same. There is in it the healing touch of the Divine Physician, and the application to the soul of the cleansing properties of the Precious Blood. When there is mortal sin, there is a spiritual raising up from the dead: 'I say to thee, arise.' Its efficacy, blessings, help, and fruits are as real now as they were at the time of its institution. Our Lord knew man's need of it, and decreed its far-reaching benefits, which were not to be impaired by time; and no Divine decree has annulled the institution. He foresaw how many poor sinners, in every age and in every state of life, would be distressed until they could un-

burden their conscience and hear the sentence of pardon. Well did He know man's weakness and spiritual maladies. Until the sick man is able to show his sores or declare his symptoms to the physician, he remains dissatisfied and restless. The sinner, too, in order to find healing and comfort, must declare his sins; and our Divine Saviour commissioned, not angels, but men acquainted with human infirmities to dress the sinner's wounds and apply the remedies.

You feel that you can never sufficiently appreciate the excellence of the sacrament of Penance in itself, but perhaps you have experienced the satisfaction that the soul derives from devoutly approaching it. You have felt how great a help the fervent reception of this sacrament is to the acquisition of true humility. The candid confession of your sins brings down the proud spirit that is innate in your nature. Pride resents the discovery of what is unworthy and of what indicates weakness; in confession you yourself reveal and acknowledge your faults, and pride gives place to confusion and sorrow. In this sacrament you feel that you are offering to God in atonement for sin a practical compliance with the requirements of penance. Our Lord has said: 'Except you do penance you shall all likewise perish' (St. Luke xiii. 5). When the disciples of St. John the Baptist did penance, the Gospel says that they 'were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins' (St. Matt. iii. 6). You do penance by receiving the holy sacrament of Penance, confessing your sins, and you perform the works imposed by the confessor by way of sacramental satisfaction. You then feel reassured

and comforted. Moreover, at your confession you feel the action of grace in the sense you experience of a fresh awakening to dutifulness. St. Augustine says that men who would turn to the works of a good life must begin by a confession of their evil deeds.\* Great conversions and true amendment date from the time of the sincere confession. Lastly, you feel that your confession produces a tightening of the bonds that unite you to Christ, and strengthens your assurance of perseverance in God's service. Of what a holy satisfaction, therefore, you would deprive yourself if you were to neglect to approach the sacrament of Penance! The tepid, and those who do not value this sacrament as they ought, would do well to weigh what has been said as to the excellence of it, and the satisfaction it affords when received with fervent dispositions.

Consider now the various acts performed in the reception of this sacrament. You prepare for it by the examination of your conscience. As your confession is made every week, and as you are accustomed to watch over the condition of your conscience, only a few moments are needed for this part of your preparation. If you spend a long time in this examination, you may make for yourself an unreal conscience, you may invent sins, or prepare fanciful accusations, or even fill your mind with scruples. None of these results will tend to make your confession better or afford you any true satisfaction. Your examination should not be either scrupulous or superficial; it should be exact. You should not spare yourself, nor

\* 'Initium operum bonorum confessio est operum malorum.'

should you fail to sift well and examine your thoughts, judgments, motives, intentions, desires, words, actions, and omissions, that you may see in what manner, how far, and how often you have offended God. When a tepid religious makes only a superficial examination, it may follow that her accusation will be stereotyped, and that her amendment, if any, will be imperceptible.

What you should perhaps chiefly dwell upon in your preparation is your sorrow for your sins. This, considered in its own special value, is even more important than the examination of conscience. There are occasions when confession may be dispensed with on account of the impossibility of making it, but sorrow is always necessary for the forgiveness of sin. You would therefore do well to devote some moments to exciting and expressing contrition. The fruit you will derive from the reception of the sacrament will in great measure, as far as your own acts are concerned, depend upon the earnestness of your sorrow.

When you have sufficiently examined your conscience and noted the result, and when you have devoted some moments to exciting sentiments of sorrow and purpose of amendment, you place yourself before the confessor. Your accusation should be clear, humble, and straightforward, to be made once and for all, and to leave no anxiety afterwards. Let it be made without hesitation, without pauses, and without repetition; put the matter in such a way before the confessor that he may understand it without having to ask questions, and do not throw upon him either the burden of sifting your guilt or of

expressing it. Religious are to be met with who are faulty and troublesome, and who consume too much time in making their confession; there does not result any greater satisfaction to themselves, they weary the confessor, and they cause a prolonged waiting to their sisters who are to follow them. It may be said that in some cases even the children under the care of religious make their confession more satisfactorily than the religious themselves.

Let me mention faults that should be avoided in making the accusation. It would be unpardonable in a religious to make use of the confessional to air her grievances, and especially to seek to put matter in such a way before the confessor as to lead him to express an opinion in her favour and against the superior; or to use confession designedly to make known the faults of superiors or others, or to impress the confessor with the belief that things are unsatisfactory in the community. It would be faulty in a religious designedly, though she may carefully conceal her intention, so to put the matter of her accusation before the confessor as to lead him to advise her to do the very thing she has made up her mind to do, and to show dissatisfaction in the event of his advising differently. Religious must avoid unreality and all posing. They would be faulty if they were to confess in such a tone of voice, and with such an affected manner and expression, and with such prepared phrases as if they wished to be held to be spiritual persons or model penitents; for in such cases there might in reality be some self-complacency or some effort to gain the confessor's good opinion.



There would also be faultiness if religious were to lengthen out their confession beyond all reasonable limit, in spite of the confessor's remonstrances, and to pretend that otherwise their accusation would not be understood. Instead, for instance, of saying: 'I have been disobedient, and have been wanting in the true spirit of obedience; I have yielded to impatience,' they would detail every aspect of the circumstances. Or, instead of saying: 'I have been at times somewhat careless and distracted in my prayers and religious exercises,' they would make this accusation in detail, with various forms of expressing it, about every one of their devotional exercises. Such religious would thus lengthen out their confession to five or ten times what it should be.

It would also be faulty if a religious confessed in so low a tone of voice that the confessor scarcely catches what is said; this might lead to misapprehension, as well as to annoyance, on the confessor's part. Moreover, this fault might render the confession more or less useless; and if there were grave sin included in the matter, doubt might arise about the validity of the sacrament.

To avoid such faults as those that have been mentioned, and others of the kind, you would do well to bring your accusations under five or six headings, and to make them with all sincerity in a few short sentences. This, speaking generally, is all that is required in the weekly confession of religious, and is what will be profitable.

Beware, finally, of pride, which may show itself in various ways, and let a spirit of faith throw a cloak

over the individuality of the confessor. Remember that he listens in a judicial and ministerial way to your accusation, to receive in Christ's name the unburdening of your conscience, and in order that, if satisfied with your dispositions, he may pronounce God's sentence of pardon. Do not yield to the temptation of striving to hide the real malice, or of not confessing distinctly the faults that weigh on your conscience. Confine yourself to a straightforward accusation, and do not in false humility say that you are a great sinner, while perhaps you would not wish to be so considered. Do not fill up your confession with accusations of what you do not sincerely believe to have been sinful, but when there has been special malice in your motives, let not pride prevent your confessing it. If at times the confessor sees well to try to help you to make your declaration, or to question you, do not resent this help, but accept it in the kindly spirit in which it is proffered.

Your accusation has now been made; if it has been full, clear, and humble, your confession will be accompanied by a sense of satisfaction. But let there be compunction; weigh, therefore, your guilt in the presence of God's infinite holiness and goodness, and in that presence confusion will take possession of you, because of the unworthiness and ingratitude seen in the commission of deliberate sin. Your trust in the Divine mercy and compassion will, however, prevent any excess of uneasiness, and fill you with consolation in the hope of full pardon. You are confident that the infinite merits and satis-

faction of our Lord plead in your behalf, and that you are now about to experience the efficacy of the holy sacrament; you are to hear from the confessor the words of Divine forgiveness, for God speaks and acts through His minister (1 Cor. iv. 1): 'Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them.'

When you have received absolution and performed the penance imposed, you will then enjoy the fruits of the holy sacrament. The essential fruits will proceed from the fulfilment of what is essential to the valid reception of the sacrament, but many special helps and graces will also be vouchsafed to you according to the sincerity of your sorrow and the fervour of your dispositions.

As a result of your confession and of the sacrament your sins have been pardoned, and you feel relief of conscience and a sense of peace restored. Moreover, help is given to strengthen the soul against its own weakness, and to preserve it from sin, and a greater hatred of sin is infused into it,\* and there will therefore be a zeal for amendment.

Let the confession you make during the course of this retreat be such that you may hope for these happy results, and let it be as a model for your future confessions. If there are certain things that make confession naturally distasteful to you, set against them the wonderful and desirable benefits that proceed from a devout reception of the sacrament of Penance—benefits which more than compensate you for any confusion your accusation

\* 'Duo sunt quæ hominem mirabiliter a peccato præservant, frequens confessio, et frequentior disciplina.'—PETER OF BLOIS.

may have caused you. Be faithful to this weekly duty, and do not easily permit the omission of it; fulfil it as one of great importance, and earnestly endeavour to derive benefit from it. If you act in this way, your confessions will afford you comfort in the midst of the difficulties and temptations of this present life, and when you see the end near, it will console you to remember your fidelity and earnestness in receiving this holy sacrament. Only in the life to come will you perceive and understand the riches of God's mercy that it has poured out upon your soul, and how it has fomented, increased, and confirmed your union with Christ. But acknowledge now the outpouring of the Divine mercy that you have experienced in the holy sacrament of Penance, and that demands your unceasing gratitude: 'Thou hast dealt with us, O Lord our God, according to all Thy goodness, and according to all that great mercy of Thine' (Baruch ii. 27).

## SIXTH DAY.

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### XVII.

#### *HUMILITY.*

‘God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.’—  
ST. JAS. iv. 6.

How significant are the many passages in the Holy Scriptures which convey the same meaning as that contained in these words of St. James! What a revelation of the Divine preference comes to us from words in our Lady’s canticle! Mary exclaimed: ‘He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid. . . . He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble.’ God’s regard is always for the humble, and we should expose ourselves to continual error in our views and conduct if we were to ignore or disguise this important fact. If we would be pleasing to God, followers of our Lord, children of grace, and aspirants to a heavenly throne, we must be humble. We should therefore deem humility an indispensable virtue, and the brightest adornment of the soul. We may say that the soul that is humble is the good ground in which virtue will take root, spring up, and yield fruit. If, then, we

would attain to solid virtue and to the favour of God in this world, and be raised to the heavenly reward hereafter, we must cultivate humility: 'He that humbleth himself shall be exalted' (St. Luke xiv. 11). The teaching of Revelation impresses upon the mind the necessity of this virtue, and we may not pretend that its lessons are uncertain or insufficient, for it affords us ample and clear instruction and guidance. This teaching is seen in the writings of the Old Testament, but more particularly in those of the New.

We may say that humility is allied with truth, just as we consider pride to be allied with falsity; the one leads us to esteem ourselves as being only what we truly are, while the other makes us regard ourselves, and wish others to regard us, as better than we really are. If we are humble, we recognize our own nothingness, perversity, weakness, dependence, lowliness, and misery, and we do not see anything of our own upon which we may pride ourselves; but we reckon every good as coming from God, the infinite and eternal Source of all that is good. We say with the Prophet: 'All nations are before Him as if they had no being at all, and are counted to Him as nothing and vanity' (Isa. xl. 17). We may define humility as a praiseworthy self-abasement, or that virtue which leads us to profess by our actions or conduct our own lowliness; it prevents us from glorifying ourselves, and from seeking, or even desiring, glory from others, and it even makes us satisfied to see others preferred before us.

It may be useful to consider in what particular



ways humility may be practised. It should be practised interiorly in thought and sentiment. A humble religious does not deceive herself by fancying herself to be in any respect more than she really is; she is only too willing to recognize her many faults and deficiencies and all her unworthiness; and she, moreover, does not wish to be counted by others more virtuous, estimable, or talented than she really is, and even strives to conceal what might win praise or esteem. She is careful not to do anything with the intention of making others think highly of her, and she entertains a lowly opinion of herself.

While thus avoiding the pitfall of pride in her mind and heart, she may yet know that she has certain talents and gifts, and others may bestow upon her unsought praise. Her humility in these circumstances prevents her from taking glory to herself, and leads her to refer it to God, from whom she justly and thankfully acknowledges every good gift to come. She recognizes her position of dependence, and regards herself as only a steward of God's gifts. To be puffed up on account of them she would deem very wrong, since it would be to rob God of the praise and glory that belong to Him. Her eyes, if they are cast upon herself, see only her lowliness and her deficiencies; her aspirations are not to be considered great, but to be truly humble, and her sentiments correspond with those of the devout Abraham when he said: 'I will speak to my Lord, whereas I am dust and ashes' (Gen. xviii. 27).

A humble religious practises humility also in speech; she does this in two ways, namely, in the

manner and in the matter of her remarks and conversation. As to the manner, she is careful not to put herself forward, and not to monopolize conversation, and she makes her remarks in a simple, unaffected way, avoiding all haughtiness or self-importance and all bitterness in the tone she adopts when speaking. Thus her very manner and tone of voice in conversation make a favourable impression, and conciliate and edify those who hear her. As to the matter of her remarks, she neither praises herself nor seeks to win the praise of others, and she carefully avoids saying what might cause confusion or pain to others. She recognizes that it is wiser to leave unsaid many things that are true if the saying of them will not be in some way profitable, and that remarks which would excite feelings of pride or self-complacency in herself or others cannot be regarded as either profitable or prudent. If she must speak of her own abilities or achievements, she does so with modesty and reserve, and not with vanity or exaggeration; and she finds pleasure in recording the successes and good deeds of others. Finally, she does not make disparaging comparisons, because she is slow to note any superiority in herself, and is ready to admit any that may be in her neighbour; and, moreover, she believes that others would turn to better account than she does the gifts, favours, and graces which God has bestowed on her.

The humble religious practises humility also in her conduct. She knows how to give preference and show due deference to others, and to keep in the background herself; and how to manifest respect,

not only to those who are in dignity above her, but also to her equals, and even to the least. This is one of the signs of true nobility of character, but she will act in this way with all simplicity, and without affectation or conceit. Others will not feel embarrassment in her society, nor will they be fearful of meeting with any rebuff or slight at her hands, or of her taking offence when none is intended. She will not put herself forward for notice or praise, nor will she expect for herself the best of everything. Finally, she will show herself ready to render little services as occasion may offer, and will not be above performing these for even the humblest of her sisters. In such ways as these she will give proof of the reality of her humility.

It would be wrong to suppose that, because a religious is humble, she therefore buries her talents, slackens her energies, or withdraws from useful labours that might excite admiration; for the greatest humility is not incompatible with the greatest success, and, as we have seen, the humble religious refers to God the glory of all she does. Imbued with the true principles of virtue and duty, she will, under obedience, exert all her powers to accomplish the task imposed upon her, and to do all the good she can.

We have thus far considered what humility is, and the ways in which it should be practised. Let us now see how necessary it is. St. Matthew records how upon an occasion the disciples approached our Lord, asking Him: 'Who, thinkest Thou, is the greater in the kingdom of heaven?' What did our

Lord answer, and how did He rebuke their ambition? Calling unto Him a little child, He set him in their midst, and said: 'Amen I say to you, unless you be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, he is the greater in the kingdom of heaven' (St. Matt. xviii. 1-4).

We may say that humility is the foundation of sanctity and of all the virtues, and that true religiousness is impossible without it. We are not, then, surprised that our Lord declared that the gates of heaven will be closed against us if we are not humble. Did not God drive from His presence the proud angels who rebelled against His sovereign decrees? A speedy and irrevocable sentence was passed upon them and forthwith carried into effect. Our Lord instanced this case when He would warn His disciples against vainglory in their achievements: 'I saw Satan,' He said, 'like lightning falling from heaven' (St. Luke x. 18).

The character and duty of our Lord's followers demand the practice of humility in a notable and appreciable degree. There must be a submission of our intellect to the dogmas of the Church, and of our will to her laws. Humility is, therefore, necessary to this required faith and obedience (St. Matt. xviii. 17). It is also one of the indispensable conditions of every prayer that is acceptable to God, and prayer is one of the chief duties of a Christian life. Finally, it is a necessary disposition for receiving the holy sacraments with profit. If, then, you consider only your character

as one of the faithful, you must acknowledge that humility becomes you in this land of your exile. Until the veils shall be lifted and the mysteries be revealed in the Land of Vision, you must wear the robes of the Passion and suffer its humiliations, for the burden of sin and its atonement are still upon you. But in God's good time, if you have suffered with our Lord, you will yet, when His glory shall be revealed, be glorified with Him (Rom. viii. 17).

Humility is very necessary in the holy state of religion, and you would be very faulty religious without it. I will not stay to consider how your obligations under the vows of poverty and chastity would be rendered of difficult fulfilment if you were wanting in humility, but I ask you how you could be truly obedient and submissive without this virtue. Where there is self-will and disregard of authority there will be pride, but where the will readily submits to authority there is humility. A religious has become the servant of Christ whose voice she recognizes in that of her superiors, and she humbly and faithfully fulfils their behests. There is special need of humility when you have to receive correction. Such an occasion may be considered a reliable test of this virtue. If when fault is justly found with your ways you resent the admonition, or become petulant and silent, and if you smart under it for a length of time, it is evident that there is some deficiency of humility. Some religious are so well grounded in this virtue that they can receive reproof with calmness even when it is unjust.

If you need humility in order to practise obedience,

it is also necessary to you to enable you to live in constant charity with your sisters. Most of your faults proceed from your relations with your neighbour, and therefore the more perfect your charity becomes, the less faulty will you be. Your charity will remain imperfect if you do not bring yourself to yield to others, to bear with others, and to try to please others; and all this demands the practice of humility, for you must overcome selfishness and self-esteem, and put yourself in the second place, if not even in the last place, and this is one of the secrets of the humility of the Saints.

While insisting on the necessity of this virtue, I do not pretend that the practice of it is not difficult. Its practice is more difficult than that of the three eminent good works, prayer, fasting and almsdeeds, for these may be described as means or stepping-stones to the acquisition of humility. Men find it hard to be so far heedless of honours and of esteem as to despise dignities, to disregard the world's praise, and not even to seek to stand well in the eyes of others, but yet harder to embrace humiliations. This should be in your eyes a proof of the eminence of humility, for it is difficult of attainment. You may never say that you are sufficiently humble, and your efforts, therefore, to acquire this virtue should continue throughout your life.

If you love humility and strive to practise it you will not be alone; you will thus imitate our Lord and His holy Mother, and St. Joseph and all the Saints, and be associated with them. Our Lord was humble in clothing Himself with our lowly humanity, and in



all the stages and ways of this mystery of His humiliation. He was humble in the poverty of Bethlehem, in the labours of His life of retirement at Nazareth, in the hardships of His missionary career, and in the ignominy of His sufferings and death. The prophecies described Him as 'despised and the most abject of men,' and 'reputed with the wicked' (Isa. liii. 3, 12). In the depths of His astonishing humiliations He says to you: 'Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart.' His Divine invitations are not to those who are unwise in their haughtiness and conceits, but to those who would be little in their own eyes. We gather this from passages in the Holy Scriptures. In the Book of Proverbs in the preaching of Wisdom, it is written: 'My delights were to be with the children of men; now therefore, ye children, hear Me. . . . Whosoever is a little one let him come to Me' (Prov. viii. 31, 32; ix. 4). Our blessed Lady tells us why God selected her for her dignity, privileges, and graces where she says: 'He hath regarded the humility of his handmaid' (St. Luke i. 48). St. Bernard declares that she humbled herself in all things and beyond all others, making herself the last of all.\* You have meditated at times upon the humility of St. John the Baptist, of St. Joseph, and of other Saints, to admire this virtue in them, and to desire it for yourselves. We read in the Breviary (February 5) how the Prefect Quintian addressed the holy martyr, St.

\* 'Cum Maria quanto major erat, humiliaret se non modo in omnibus, sed et præ omnibus. Merito facta est novissima prima, quæ, prima cum esset omnium, sese novissimam faciebat.'

Agatha, saying insidiously : ' Of noble birth as you are, are you not ashamed to lead the humble and servile life of the Christians ? ' Her reply, recorded for the edification of the Church, teaches you of what value you should hold humility. ' Christian humility and subjection,' she answered, ' are much more excellent than the riches and pomp of Kings.' When you study the lessons the Saints teach by their lives and their words, you learn how you should strive to win the Divine favour by practising humility, for ' God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.'

Religious are not free from the assaults of pride, since it is a vice to which fallen human nature is prone. One of the remedies to be applied to lessen and destroy it is the effort to be humble ; you must understand the value of humility, love it, and strive to practise it. If there are religious who do none of these things they will be more or less under the bondage of the vice of pride. This vice manifests itself when religious disdain or look down on others, when their conversation turns ever on themselves and their doings, when they seek praise, when they strive to acquire some position of honour, when they allow a sense of self-importance to take possession of them, when they overrate their own talents and labours, and deem that these are not sufficiently recognized by others, when they easily take offence, when they resent just reproof, and when they object to the exercise of rightly constituted authority over them. You should, therefore, examine yourselves upon these and other such faults opposed to humility.

Why have great men fallen? Why have angels fallen? Because of pride of the intellect and pride of heart. We read in the prophet Isaias: 'How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, who didst rise in the morning? . . . Thou saidst in thy heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. . . . I will be like the Most High. But yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, into the depth of the pit' (Isa. xiv. 12-15). Our blessed Lady tells us how men are brought low because of pride: 'He hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart: He hath put down the mighty from their seat' (St. Luke i. 51, 52). In how many cases mental aberration and moral degradation seem to have come as a punishment of pride! Why, we may also ask, have religious fallen? There was a time when they were little in their own eyes, devout, and submissive; but when they began to think much of themselves, other faults followed, for they came to look down upon their superiors, to resent correction, and to refuse submission. The humble and holy yoke of religion became burdensome, and in the case of some they passed under the yoke of some fatal folly, and abandoned their vocation.

The danger of pride is not always in the far distance; it is more frequently near, even in the depths of your own heart. Piety and self-knowledge must keep this innate vice from rising to the surface and from menacing you in its own hiding-place. The more earnestly you walk in the paths of grace by devout prayer and dutiful conduct, the greater strength you will acquire to conquer this insidious

foe, and the more you study your own nothingness, weakness, misery, and foolishness, and your entire dependence on God, the less will you be inclined to vanity and self-complacency. Turn suppliantly to God, from whom all good proceeds, and pray to Him in the words of St. Augustine: 'Grant, O Lord, that I may know Thee and know myself, to the end that I may love Thee and despise myself.'\*

Happy will you be if you leave this retreat more humble than when you began it, and yet happier if you are determined ever to cultivate and practise this all-necessary virtue of humility. It is not the lofty peaks rising into the sky that are verdant and productive, but the lowly valleys; and deep in the waters lie the rich pearls destined to be set in the diadems of kings. If you would be rich in grace and fruitful in good works, and if you would be dear to God and be raised to a heavenly throne, love and practise humility, for 'God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.' Let it be your constant endeavour to practise this virtue in thought and sentiment, in speech and in act, and pray for the grace to do so. Cling to it as a safeguard amidst the dangers to which your soul is exposed in this world, and as a hopeful sign of the heavenly reward. For where is now the humble Virgin who called herself the handmaid of the Lord? Where the lowly carpenter who led so retired a life with Jesus and Mary at Nazareth? Where all those servants of God who loved reproach for His sake, and whom the world scorned? What testimony

\* 'Noverim Te, noverim me, ut amem Te, et contemnam me.'

shall the proud and wicked give concerning them ? ' Behold,' they shall say, 'how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the Saints ' (Wisd. v. 5).

When the mists of earth, the vapourings of vanity, the false ideas of human greatness, and the delusions of error and falsity shall be dispelled by the Divine light of truth and justice in the world to come, then shall the proud be confounded and the humble be reassured, for then shall be verified the foretelling of our Lord : ' Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted ' (St. Luke xiv. 11).

## XVIII.

### *THE SACRED PASSION.*

‘Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and so to enter into His glory?’—ST. LUKE xxiv. 26.

WE listen to these words and weigh their meaning with all possible reverence, because they were the words of Christ Himself, uttered on the day of the Resurrection. It had been decreed and foretold that our Lord should suffer, and He Himself had said that it should come to pass (St. Matt. xvi. 21), and no word of God should remain unfulfilled. This is one of the greatest mysteries of our holy faith, and one that the Church dutifully honours and commemorates in her Liturgy and devotions; it commands our wonder and admiration, and our praise, piety, and gratitude. The mystery of the sacred Passion brings immeasurable consolation to fallen man, for the sufferings of God-made-Man are the price of man’s reconciliation with God (Isa. liii. 5), and the effectual balsam for his sins and miseries. Through those atoning sufferings peace has been restored, and now again man is made heir to the kingdom of heaven. But even as Christ entered into His glory through sufferings and death, so by the same decree



is it appointed that man must follow in the same path to attain his glorious destiny (Rom. viii. 17).

What place has the sacred Passion in your devotions? Should it not be as a powerful magnet, ever attracting your love towards the Divine Saviour who suffered for you? Day by day throughout the whole world the memory of this mystery is renewed in the holy Mass; and the Church, as a faithful Spouse, erects everywhere the crucifix to remind her children of it. In honour of this mystery, and to invoke its salutary efficacy, the priests of the Church constantly make the sign of the cross in the Mass, in administering the sacraments, and in many rites and ceremonies. Thus and in other ways is it seen how much the Church seeks to perpetuate the remembrance of the sacred Passion, and to move her children to devotion to this mystery of Christ's love for man. St. Paul only voiced the motive of the Church in all this when he said: 'We preach Christ crucified' (1 Cor. i. 23). Ask yourselves how you listen to this preaching, and how you are affected towards this mystery. Does the making of the sign of the cross on yourselves help to nourish your devotion to our Lord's Passion, to make you loyal to His standard, and to inspire you with courage and patience? Do you in the holy Mass assist in spirit at the sacrifice on Calvary? Is it to you as the showing forth of the death of the Lord until He shall come? (1 Cor. xi. 26). Do you in Holy Communion feed in spirit as well as in reality on the Divine Victim of that sacrifice? In your sorrows, sufferings, and other trials do you seek comfort and

strength by uniting yourselves in spirit with our Lord in His overwhelming sorrows and sufferings? Does your love of Him lead you frequently to recall and meditate on His bitter Passion? In these various ways you should show your practical devotion to this mystery.

You will readily acknowledge that devotion to the sacred Passion must prove very beneficial. Love of our Lord is manifested in the Church, and is fostered by a triplet of devotions which have for object the most notable manifestations of His love for men, namely, the Holy Eucharist, the sacred Passion, and the sacred Heart. These devotions are fruitful in every kind of grace. *I*

Let us now in spirit approach our Lord in the scenes of His sufferings, and pass them in review. This will help to impress our mind with the greatness of His sacrifice. His sufferings were predicted chiefly in the writings of David and Isaias, and the predictions came literally to be fulfilled. After their fulfilment, when He had risen again, He said to the Apostles: 'These are the words which I spoke to you while I was yet with you, that all things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning Me' (St. Luke xxiv. 44).

The scenes of our Lord's sufferings were various. They began in the garden of Gethsemani; they continued in the house of Annas and in that of Caiphas, then in the governor's hall (St. John xviii. 13, 24, 28), and before Herod (St. Luke xxiii. 7). The completion of the iniquitous judgment took place in the

governor's hall, the scourging was inflicted in the court attached to it; and subsequently our Lord sallied forth, descending the steps of the pretorium, to traverse the way to Calvary. These sad and painful scenes culminated in the crucifixion on Calvary.

It is difficult to conceive and describe our Lord's interior sufferings. There had always been foreknowledge and expectation, and how far these weighed upon His spirit it would be impossible to conjecture. That He was affected by them we gather from His own words: 'I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished' (St. Luke xii. 50). The betrayal of Judas caused a cruel blow to His most tender and generous feelings. This is expressed in prophecy where David says: 'For even the man of My peace in whom I trusted, who eat My bread, hath greatly supplanted Me' (Ps. xl. 10; liv. 14, 15). Bitter with anguish was His sacred Heart when, entering the garden at Gethsemani, 'He began to grow sorrowful and to be sad,' and said: 'My soul is sorrowful even unto death.' So great was His interior suffering on this occasion that 'His sweat became as drops of blood trickling down upon the ground' (St. Luke xxii. 44). While His enemies were inflicting upon Him every kind of indignity and suffering, how intense must have been His sense of the ignominy and cruel outrage! In the person of David He says: 'My soul is filled with evils' (Ps. lxxxvii. 4).

These interior sufferings may have been felt more intensely by our Lord than even the most painful of

those that were exterior. Before Annas He was struck a violent blow by one of the servants, although His reply to the high priest's questions had been faultless. Before Caiphas some spat in His face and buffeted Him, while others struck His face with the palms of their hands, saying: 'Prophecy unto us, O Christ, who is he that struck Thee?' When Pilate sent our Lord to Herod, 'Herod with his army set Him at nought and mocked Him, putting on Him a white garment' (St. Luke xxiii. 11). He was then sent back to Pilate, who wished to release Him. With a view to this Pilate asked the people which of the two whom he had in custody they demanded to be released to them on account of the paschal solemnity—Jesus or Barabbas, a 'notorious prisoner.' Hereupon the people demanded Barabbas, and our Lord saw this wicked robber preferred to Himself.

The cruel sufferings that then followed were the scourging and the crowning with thorns, accompanied as they were by every kind of outrage. The scourging is passed over by the evangelists with the bare mention of the fact that it occurred, but tradition describes it as having been very cruel and excessive; so that the words of David—'I have been scourged all the day, and My chastisement hath been in the morning' (Ps. lxxii. 14)—are quoted in description of it. More is said of the crowning with thorns. We are told that the soldiers of the governor took our Lord into the hall or court, and there gathered unto Him the whole band. David would seem to describe the seizure of our Lord where he says: 'For tribulation is very near, for there is none to help Me;

many calves have surrounded Me, fat bulls have besieged Me'; but when he describes the scene in Pilate's hall, he says: 'For many dogs have encompassed Me; the council of the malignant hath besieged Me' (Ps. xxi. 12, 13, 17). The soldiers stripped our Lord, and clothed Him with a scarlet cloak, and plaiting a crown of thorns they pressed it upon His head. In His right hand they placed a reed. Thus attired, He was treated as a mock king; then the soldiers spat upon Him, and gave Him blows, and, taking the reed, they beat Him on the head, driving the thorns in deeper.

I leave to your own meditations the scenes that followed. The soldiers clothed our Lord once more in His own garments, they put the heavy cross on His shoulder, and led Him forth. Let us pass over the incidents on the way to Calvary. When He reached the summit He was once more stripped, and was then thrown upon the cross and nailed to it. He bore the excruciating pain of this detail of the crucifixion without a murmur; the overflowing charity of His sacred Heart treasured it as a priceless offering to make to God for His own glory and for man's salvation. He was then raised nailed to the cross, bleeding from many wounds, to hang in agonizing sufferings for three long hours, and to be in death the acceptable Victim for the sins of the whole world.

All these scenes and sufferings took place at different times of the day and night. It was already night when Judas left the supper-room (St. John xiii. 30), so that when this base betrayer of his Lord went with a band to apprehend Jesus, they took with

them lanterns and torches (St. John xviii. 3). David speaking, as it is interpreted, in our Lord's name, says: 'Evening and morning, and at noon I will speak and declare; and He shall hear My voice; He shall redeem My soul in peace from them that draw near to Me' (Ps. liv. 18, 19) ' . . . I have cried in the day, and in the night before Thee' (Ps. lxxxvii. 2). After our Lord was seized and bound, the night was spent in the house of Caiphas, and in the morning He was taken to the governor's hall. The crucifixion took place at noon, and death occurred three hours later. During these hours were verified the words: 'My enemies have trodden on Me all the day long, for they are many that make war against Me' (Ps. lv. 3). There was a solitariness about our Lord's sacrifice, for only His sufferings and death could atone for sin. He might have said with the prophets: 'O God, my God, look upon Me: why hast Thou forsaken Me?' (Ps. xxi. 2). 'I have trodden the winepress alone. . . . I looked about, and there was none to help' (Isa. lxiii. 3, 5). The evangelist tells us how the prophecies were fulfilled, for just before His death our Lord cried out with a loud voice: 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' (St. Matt. xxvii. 46). Pain was added to His sense of desolation by the blasphemies, derision, and mockery of the unfeeling spectators of His sufferings. This was foretold by David, where, speaking in the person of Christ, he says: 'I am a worm and no man, the reproach of men and the outcast of the people. All they that saw Me have laughed Me to scorn; they have spoken with the lips, and wagged the head: He



hoped in the Lord, let Him deliver Him; let Him save Him, seeing He delighteth in Him' (Ps. xxi. 7-9).

Our Lord in His sacred Passion suffered in every part of His Body and shed every drop of His Blood. In this we see the extreme generosity of the Divine sacrifice. His head was pierced with thorns; His face was discoloured and swollen and cut open by the many blows received; His shoulders were mangled by the heavy, rough cross; His arms and whole body were cut and lacerated by the inhuman scourging; His knees were broken by His falling under the weight of the cross, and His hands and feet were bored by the cruel nails (Zach. xiii. 6; Ps. xxi. 17). In all this our Lord bears the tokens of man's sinfulness, as it is described in *Isaias*: 'From the sole of the foot unto the top of the head there is no soundness therein; wounds, and bruises, and swelling sores' (Isa. i. 6). '... There is no beauty in Him, nor comeliness... and we have thought Him as it were a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted' (Isa. liii. 2, 4). In this most generous sacrifice our Lord was not only the Victim, but also the Priest; there was therein no withdrawal from the holocaust, and no constraint in the offering of it: 'He was offered because it was His own will, and He opened not His mouth' (Isa. liii. 7). His dying words convey this meaning: 'It is consummated'; I have held nothing back, the holocaust is complete; all the prophecies have been fulfilled; I have paid the full price for the redemption of every human soul; and now 'into Thy hands, O Father, I commend my spirit' (St. Luke xxiii. 46).

This is but a brief study of the few hours of the sacred Passion. Consider the chief lessons it teaches us. It should make us reflect on the Sovereignty and Holiness of God which demanded such an atonement. 'Thy eyes,' says the prophet, 'are too pure to behold evil, and Thou canst not look on iniquity' (Hab. i. 13). 'To God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike' (Wisd. xiv. 9). How, then, could the fallen sinner be acceptable to God, so that He should be pleased with any atonement the sinner might offer? But when we consider the infinite character of God's Majesty and Holiness, do we not see that fallen man could not offer adequate satisfaction? If that was so in the case of Adam's sin, is it not also so in the case of every sin we commit? Do we not all need the all-atoning and infinitely precious sacrifice of our Saviour to reconcile us to God? Of ourselves, when we have sinned, we are not in a condition of acceptableness, nor have we anything of adequate value to sacrifice so as to meet the demands of God's justice.

Another lesson, then, besides that of the infinite Sovereignty and Holiness of God is the infinite character of His justice. We read in the prophet Amos: 'Judgment shall be revealed as water, and justice as a mighty torrent' (v. 24). If it is irresistible in its exercise and sentences, it is also exacting in its demands. This explains why a Divine Victim should atone for an offence offered to God when God decreed to demand condign or adequate satisfaction. ¶ This consideration teaches us a third lesson, namely, the enormity of sin, and how deservedly it is

called an evil. To expiate it cost our Lord all those wounds and sufferings that we have depicted all too briefly, and His death on the cross ; we cannot, therefore, but count sin a profound mystery, the revelation of which is reserved with many others for the life to come. Yet we see in it, as it strikes us even now, an appalling evil. With David we may well ask : ‘ Who can understand sin? ’ (Ps. xviii. 13).

There are other lessons to learn from the sacred Passion. It speaks to us of our Lord’s intense and generous love. He gave His very life for all, even for those who have never loved Him and who never will love Him—He died for both just and sinners. St. Paul points out that all men were under sin when our Lord accepted the office of Redeemer : ‘ Scarce for a just man will one die . . . but God commendeth His charity towards us, because when as yet we were sinners, according to the time, Christ died for us ’ (Rom. v. 7-9). In His Passion our Lord becomes our model and leader in that spirit of sacrifice which He demands in His followers. It is well, in these days of relaxation and self-indulgence, to recall His words : ‘ If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me ’ (St. Matt. xvi. 24). Finally, our Lord puts before us in His sufferings special lessons in virtue, both for our admiration and imitation. He is silent under false accusation, and He submits to cruel, unmerited indignities and pains ; meekness and humility are displayed in all the scenes of the Passion ; and He suffers patiently, and with entire conformity to the Divine decrees.

These are some of the lessons that should impress themselves on our mind as we study the sacred Passion. There has been no event like it in the history of the world—nothing so wonderful or so appalling, nothing productive of so much good. We contemplate in it the price paid for man's reconciliation with God, for his present peace and happiness, for the remission of his daily sins (Heb. ix. 22), and for his salvation and future glory; through it grace is poured upon the souls of men in countless ways, but especially by means of the holy sacraments, and its merits are ever pleading to God in behalf of those for whom Jesus suffered, who, if they are justified, are so through it; as St. Paul says, 'being justified freely by His grace through the redemption' (Rom. iii. 24).

What return, then, does this mystery of the sacred Passion demand? There should be a continual and everlasting thanksgiving. This mystery was the burden of the new canticle which St. John heard sung in heaven by the four Living Creatures and the four-and-twenty Ancients when the Lamb had opened the mysterious book with seven seals. 'Thou art worthy, O Lord,' they said, 'to take the book, and to open the seals thereof, because Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God in Thy Blood' (Apoc. v. 9). 'Sing ye to the Lord,' says Isaias, 'for He hath done great things; show this forth in all the earth' (xii. 5). Let, then, the mystery of the sacred Passion have its place in your devotions and in your meditations; keep it in constant remembrance with pious affection and thanksgiving. Offer frequently to God the sufferings, satisfactions, and merits of our

Lord to atone for your sins. When you have the misfortune to commit any sin, enter into yourself at once, and with sincere compunction beg God's forgiveness; do not, however, give way to dejection, but turning with faith and confidence to Jesus Crucified, even as the Israelites in the desert looked towards the Brazen Serpent, offer to God the sacred Wounds of your Saviour, and you will obtain pardon and peace. Seek through your meditations on the Passion to nourish your aspirations to holiness of life, and to increase your spirit of self-abnegation and patience. In your sorrows and sufferings unite yourselves to our Lord in His, that yours may thus be sanctified and rendered meritorious; and when serious illness overtakes you, let this union be even more earnest and fervent, that you may receive an abundance of grace, strength, and consolation in that time of trial and need. Now is the time to nourish your devotion, that you may then enjoy its desirable fruits.

I say in conclusion, may you live in imitation of our Lord in His sacred Passion. You have seen Him bound and led captive—suffer yourself to be bound by the requirements of your holy rule, and practise self-restraint; you have seen Him buffeted and derided—be not over-solicitous about the respect due to you; you have seen Him carrying His cross—do not refuse to carry yours, and ever readily and loyally submit to the yoke of religion; you have seen Him in suffering and agony—do not repine when the same lot is yours; and you have seen Him die—for His sake die to the world and to yourself. As in His case the path of ignominy was the road to glory,

and the way of death the path to life—for 'ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and so enter into His glory?'—so shall it be in your case. Pray, then, to God to impress you with a lively and practical devotion to the sacred Passion, for the price of your reconciliation and of your salvation, and the bond of your union with Christ, as well as the life-spring of the grace that is to bring you to His kingdom, is the precious Blood shed in the sufferings and death of your Redeemer.



## XIX.

### *THE HOLY EUCHARIST.*

‘He that eateth Me, the same also shall live by Me.’—  
ST. JOHN vi. 58.

THE tide of love has never in any heart risen so high, or flowed at once so gently or so strongly, as in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and no other has given such wonderful manifestations of love. But the conceptions of Jesus, like His Heart Itself, are divine. Among the tokens of His love we have the admirable and astonishing institution of the Holy Eucharist, which is both a sacrifice and a sacrament. Herein He Himself becomes a daily victim on our altars, the heavenly food of our souls, and the centre of Catholic worship. Herein, too, His love constrains Him to linger still among us, and mysteriously veiled, but ever present even to establish a lasting dwelling in our tabernacles. Of this mystery St. Paul says: ‘The chalice of benediction which we bless, is it not the communion of the Blood of Christ? And the bread which we break, is it not the partaking of the Body of the Lord?’ He goes on to point out how the Holy Communion unites our Lord’s followers into one mystical body: ‘For we being many are one

bread, one body, all that partake of one bread' (1 Cor. x. 16. 17; Rom. xii. 5).<sup>\*</sup> This spiritual union with one another in the Church through this sacrament is the result of that union of all with Christ, of which He Himself says: 'He that eateth Me, the same also shall live by Me.'

Seeing that by these words the devout communicant receives our Lord's promise of special grace, and of being sustained in a holy and spiritual life by the very Author of life and grace, you can understand how you ought to treasure them as containing a most consoling promise. What do religious desire, if not to persevere in grace and in union with our Lord, to whom they have consecrated themselves? There should be a union with Him in spirit, affection, and desire; a union by submission and by correspondence with the Divine will, so that the devout religious may be able to say with St. Paul: 'I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me' (Gal. ii. 20). The greatest help to effect this desirable union of the soul with Christ, and at the same time the fullest realization of it, is through the reception of the Holy Eucharist; for through this sacrament you become one with Him. This is the meaning of our Lord's words.

We stand amazed at all the wonders displayed in this mystery of the Holy Eucharist. Why, we ask,

\* The true and full meaning of these and corresponding passages of the sacred Scriptures should be reflected on by those who do not receive this holy sacrament in its reality in the Catholic Church, where it is consecrated and administered just as in the days of the Apostles.

should the Divine condescensions have gone so far, and why do they continue so long? They will continue, we know, even to the end of all time. Moreover, the Holy Eucharist is a gift to all. As to the conception of this mystery, no creature-mind could have conceived the idea of Christ's giving Himself to the faithful, or could have invented a way by which this, even if conceived, could be carried into effect. Father Faber says: 'The wisdom of the Cherubim cannot fathom the depths of this adorable sacrament, neither can the burning love of the Seraphim adequately praise the inventions of compassion which are contained therein' (Prologue. Triumph 1).

Note also what may be termed the universality of the Eucharist. The faithful in every age and in every land have had the Holy Sacrifice and the Blessed Sacrament, and thus shall it continue to be until the end of the world. You and I are in the Divine thought and plan; we have been provided for. Many will not use the Eucharistic food, even as those invited would not come to the banquet prepared for them (St. Luke xiv. 16), but it is made ready for them.

How wonderful are the operations of grace through the Holy Eucharist! Its effects are seen in the individual soul and in the Church—if in one, then most certainly in the other. It may be described as sustaining, comforting, and adorning the soul, and in preserving religion in the world and fervour in the Church.

Our Lord has in this sacrament given us food for our soul. The soul, then, has its nourishment, not

only from the bread of the word of God, which is especially food for the mind (Deut. viii. 3 ; St. Matt. iv. 4), but also from the 'Living Bread' of the Eucharist, in which it draws its spiritual life from Christ Himself. Every time we receive Holy Communion, our Lord says to us through His Church, even as He said to His Apostles at the Last Supper : 'Take, ye and eat ; This is My Body.' There is no unreality about this heavenly food, for our Lord's emphatic teaching assures us concerning it where He says : 'For My Flesh is meat indeed, and My Blood is drink indeed' (St. John vi. 56). This sacrament, then, gives us the Body and Blood of our Lord for the food and nourishment of our soul, not figuratively, but truly, really, and substantially.\* This is the richest treasure of the Church and of the soul of every true Christian ; and, full of faith and devotion, we may say, in the words of David : 'Besides Thee what do I desire upon earth ? For Thee my flesh and my heart hath fainted away ; Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion for ever ; for behold they that go far from Thee shall perish. . . . It is good for me to adhere to my God' (Ps. lxxii. 25-28).

\* 'I profess likewise . . . that in the most holy Sacrament of the Eucharist there is truly, really, and substantially the Body and Blood, together with the Soul and Divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that there is made a conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the Body, and of the whole substance of the wine into the Blood.'—Creed of Pope Pius IV.

After the Consecration there is absolutely no bread in the Sacred Host, but the Body of our Lord, according to His own Divine words,

This Divine food comforts the soul, not alone because of Christ's presence, but also because of the special graces it imparts. It comforts the soul in its life struggles against the enemies of its salvation, in its sorrows and afflictions, and in its anxieties and misgivings. Our Lord had an angel to comfort Him after His victory over Satan in the desert, and when He was overwhelmed with anguish in the garden; but again and again in our trials He Himself becomes our Comforter in the Holy Eucharist. 'Come to Me,' He says, 'all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you' (St. Matt. xi. 28). The spiritual sweetness of this sacrament solaces the soul in the bitterness of its trials. Of the manna which prefigured it we read: 'Thou didst feed Thy people with the food of angels, and gavest them bread from heaven prepared without labour, having in it all that is delicious and the sweetness of every taste' (Wisdom. xvi. 20). We who feed upon the 'Living Bread come down from heaven' may say with the spouse in the Canticles: 'The King hath brought me into His store-rooms' (i. 3) '... His fruit was sweet to my palate' (ii. 3) '... I am become in His presence as one finding peace' (viii. 10).

This Divine food adorns the soul with spiritual beauty, giving it a nearer approach in likeness to Him who nourishes it. In the Decree of the Institution of the solemnity of Corpus Christi (A.D. 1264), Pope Urban IV. says of the Eucharist: 'It is not changed into him who eats It; but, on the contrary, if It has been worthily partaken of, It transforms the

receiver and makes him like unto Itself.’\* This is the heavenly nourishment given to us to prepare the soul for a glorious immortality. Pope Leo XIII., in his Encyclical Letter on the Eucharist, says that this sacrament ‘is both the source and the pledge of blessedness and glory, and this not for the soul alone, but for the body also. For it enriches the soul with an abundance of heavenly blessings, and fills it with a sweet joy which far surpasses man’s hope and expectations; it sustains him in adversity, strengthens him in the spiritual combat, preserves him for life everlasting, and as a special provision for the journey accompanies him thither.’ What nobler adornment has the soul than charity and the other Christian virtues? These are helped and increased by the graces imparted through the Holy Eucharist.

This great sacrament tends eminently to preserve religion in the world and fervour in the Church, both by reason of the exterior worship that it demands, and of its influence and operations in the spiritual life of those who receive it. In the worship of the Holy Eucharist there must be churches built suitable for the performance of the Divine Mysteries. These churches are studded all over the world, and they are as silent voices reminding men of God and of the worship due to Him, and they thus help to maintain faith and religion. There must also be altars and

\* ‘*Cibus sum grandium; cresce et manducabis Me; nec tu Me in te mutabis, sicut cibum carnis tuæ, sed tu mutaberis in Me*’ (words that St. Augustine represents our Lord as addressing to himself).—‘*Confessions*,’ Book VII., Chapter X.



the appointed rites and ceremonies, and a priesthood with an imperishable life to consecrate the Eucharist in every age till the end of the world. There is only one great Divine High Priest ; all others are ministers of His priesthood, and they are associated intimately with Him, whose power and authority are vested in them when they act in His name. Thus, in the matter of the Holy Eucharist, when our Lord said to His Apostles : ‘ Do this for a commemoration of Me,’ His words meant : ‘ Say what I have said, do what I have done, give what I have given, for I hereby make you associates in My priesthood, empowering you to act in My name and as though in My very person ; and, as I have consecrated and given you My Body and Blood, so I ordain you to consecrate and give the same to others.’ The continuance of the Eucharist demands the perpetuation of the priesthood with its functions. To destroy or discontinue the ever-living priesthood, with its glorious hierarchy, would be to give religion its death-blow in the world.

The Holy Eucharist maintains fervour in the Church. This statement has its negative proof, inasmuch as where the Sacred Mysteries are neglected and where the Divine Banquet is disregarded, it is seen that the faithful are worldly and apathetic. The opposite result is observed where the services of the Church are numerous and well attended, and where the holy sacraments are frequented. Where this is the case, there is a zeal for religion, works of charity flourish, and a spirit of piety pervades Catholic society. In religious institutes, where there is earnest

practical devotion to the Most Holy Sacrament, there is also devotedness to the religious life, a becoming spirit of discipline and mutual edification. The Holy Eucharist is the truest and most important stay of the religious life. So necessary, then, to fervour in the Church is this Divine Sacrament, that every effort is made by the Church to promote piety in the priesthood, and to foster devotion to the Holy Eucharist among the faithful. It may be said that without the nourishment of this heavenly food our souls would not only fall from fervour, but they would also become spiritually destitute. We were in our Lord's mind when He instituted this sacrament, and the fulness of its benefits have been prepared for us; if, then, we have fallen from fervour, or if we are spiritually impoverished, the fault must be our own; it will be discovered that we have lost relish for the heavenly nourishment.

Let us, seeing the admirable effects of the Holy Eucharist in the individual soul and in the Church, praise God for the operations of grace which it accomplishes. Poor and weak as we are of ourselves, and mere nonentities in the midst of creation, we should recognize the end of this Divine institution, which is to draw us to Christ, and even to unite us to Him, that we may live by His strength, and be raised up to an everlasting union with Him in heaven. The magnanimity, generosity, intensity, and constancy of Divine Love manifested in this institution should be the continual theme of our meditations, devotions, thanksgiving, and praise. Only thus shall we come to realize more and more

what the Eucharist is, and foster our piety towards this mystery.

Let me now point out the particular ways in which you should show your devotion to it.

There is, first of all, the holy Mass offered for the living and the dead, which, in its own appointed way, is a continual and oft-repeated renewal of the sacrifice of Calvary. This most holy Sacrifice fulfils all the ends of worship and meets all the requirements of devotion. It brings down from the Author of grace and the Father of mercies countless blessings upon the Church, and especially upon the communities in which it is offered. Do not weary of assisting daily at holy Mass, and be earnest in your faith and devotion during it. You know how powerless man is of himself to render to God acceptable praise and to merit His favours; it is written: 'All flesh is grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of the field' (Isa. xl. 6); but now 'Christ our pasch is sacrificed' (1 Cor. v. 7), and there is in every place sacrifice, and there is offered to God a clean oblation (Mal. i. 11), which is no other than His Only-begotten Son. When Abraham, at God's command, placed his only son on the altar to sacrifice him, we read what blessings from heaven it drew upon him. 'By My own self have I sworn, saith the Lord, because thou hast done this thing, and hast not spared thy only-begotten son for My sake, I will bless thee' (Gen. xxii. 16, 17). When, in union with the priest, you devoutly offer to God the Divine Victim of our altars, be assured that heavenly favours will descend upon you.

When God was destroying with a consuming fire the murmurers in the desert, we are told how Aaron by prayer appeased His anger. 'He offered the incense, and standing between the dead and the living, he prayed for the people, and the plague ceased' (Num. xvi. 47, 48). On another occasion, when there was a pestilence in Israel in the days of David, the prophet Gad said to the King: 'Go up, and build an altar to the Lord in the thrashing floor of Areuna the Jebusite.' David did as was commanded, 'and offered holocausts and peace-offerings: and the Lord became merciful to the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel' (2 Kings xxiv. 25). If this was so upon the offering of priestly prayer and of oxen, will you not, by the offering of the Divine Victim in the Mass, both avert evils and bring upon you and your communities heavenly protection? Thereby also you will appease God's anger, merited by your past sins and perhaps by your daily faults (Council of Trent, Sess. 22, Ch. II.).

Love, then, the holy Mass. No red streams now flow from a gibbet upon which hangs a Divine Victim, and no loud cry tells that the soul and life have passed away; but in the still sanctuary, with only a tinkling bell to announce the fact, once more—yes, daily—is Jesus Himself sacrificed again and again in the holy mysteries, He Himself being on our altars both Priest and Victim. The words He spoke of old, found in Gospel page, are spoken once again—yes, daily: 'This is My Body: This is My Blood,' and again is repeated the miracle of miracles, and again is transacted the scene of His Sacrifice. That

the holy Sacrifice may be completely yours, make the practice when you assist at it of uniting yourself to the Divine Victim, and offering to God your life and your labours.

You show your devotion to the Holy Eucharist, in the second place, by the frequent and fervent reception of Holy Communion. This is the heavenly Manna which our Lord, in His surpassing love, has prepared for your soul's nourishment. You recognize, by what we have already seen as to its effects, that by neglecting to receive Holy Communion you would deprive your soul of precious graces. Live ever in the desire of approaching the sacred Banquet, and receive Communion as often as you are permitted to do so ; but be careful not to indulge in any sentimentality, loose reverence, or pretended fears. Let there be no lack of solid piety and religious humility, and do not too easily permit various pretexts to keep you from Communion. What should be said of religious who hold back from it ? Will the other members of the community be able always to attribute good reasons for such abstention ? What, again, should be said of other religious who receive Communion on the usual days, but who make no effort to be more dutiful, although everyone sees the faulty character of their lives ? There should be not only the reality of the sacramental union, but also a union with our Lord in spirit, in will, in life, and in work.

Your devotion to the Holy Eucharist should, in the third place, be to the Real Presence in the Tabernacle. The consecrated Host is rightly

described as 'our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.' Love your Community Chapel, love the Tabernacle, do homage to our Lord's sacramental presence, make your visit with sincere piety and joy. From the holy Tabernacle flow many graces and consolations; you must be there to gather them. Expand your heart that you may gather abundantly. There you will learn lessons of confidence, patience, and generosity; there you will pay your homage to your King, and He will animate you with sentiments of courage and loyalty; and there you will acknowledge your infidelities, expose your wounds, and make known your needs, and come away comforted. Father Faber says: 'It is there at the door of the tabernacle that we find our true place in creation, that our pride is tamed while our wounds are being dressed and healed, and our restlessness is made ashamed while it is rebuked by that voiceless love.\* Do honour, then, to this mystery of Christ's dwelling with us; seek Him as your Father and Friend; and pray to Him for every blessing for yourselves, your community, and the Church.

Renew in this retreat your devotion to the Holy Eucharist. You do not expect in this life that our Lord will remove the veil under which it pleases Him to hide His adorable Presence, but you will beseech Him to increase your faith and your love. It is none the less Himself who is with you in the Holy Eucharist, although He does not appear except under that humble veil. Venerate this sacrament

\* 'The Blessed Sacrament,' Book III. ('A Picture of God'), p. 264.



accordingly; the figures of the Old Law have passed away, and now we have the reality that, as a shadow, they preceded. Now is it said: 'I am the Bread of life'; to become partakers of everlasting life you must eat of that Bread, which is no other than Christ Himself. The mystery is renewed day by day, and it will continue to the end. Let there be a daily and continual renewal on your part, until the veil shall be removed, of devotion and of a devout use of this holy sacrament, that, sustained by the fruits of this Tree of Life, you may not faint on the way, but may come safely to the realms of everlasting rest and glory.

## SEVENTH DAY.

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### XX.

#### *THE SACRED HEART.*

‘Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end.’—ST. JOHN xiii. 1.

It affords us great satisfaction to note the rapid growth in the Church of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and especially to see it so universally and fervently practised in religious communities. We cannot but acknowledge in this the finger of God, since from this devotion have resulted abundant fruits of sanctification. It is our Lord’s will by this devotion to draw hearts to Himself, for only by His grace and under His blessing has it made progress. We seem to hear Him say once more: ‘I am come to cast fire on the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?’ (St. Luke xii. 49). He is the Divine Author of that light of faith and that fire of charity which produce and maintain spiritual zeal, dutifulness and piety among His followers. Let us hope that none of us are strangers to the influence of these sacred gifts of faith and charity, and that we ever desire, seek, and pray for an increase of them as a means of becoming more pleasing to God.

If we are to receive any favours from God, we cannot claim them by any right; they must come from His love, compassion and bounty. We must ever be humble suppliants, conscious of our dependence upon Him, and of our unworthiness of His gifts. We have, however, every reason for confidence, because of our faith in God's infinite love and in the infinite merits of our Divine Mediator. We look up in our distress to Jesus our loving Redeemer, and we see His Sacred Heart beating for us and yearning for us. This spectacle, this revelation, comforts and encourages us. We call to mind the words of the Beloved Disciple: 'Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end'; and knowing that we have become 'His own' by our religious profession, we feel inspired with an assured confidence that His light will ever guide our steps, and His grace supports us even 'unto the end.'

Devotion to the Sacred Heart draws us most powerfully towards the two special mysteries of Christ's love for men; these are the sacred Passion and its complement, the most Holy Eucharist. This was intended by the Sovereign Pontiffs who favoured this devotion. When Pope Clement XIII. in 1765 approved of the festival of the Sacred Heart, he expressly wished that the faithful, in celebrating it, should bring to mind our Lord's love 'in taking upon Himself our human nature, in suffering, in dying for man's redemption, and in instituting the sacrament of His Body and Blood as a commemoration of His death.' When Pope Pius VI. granted a wider extension of this celebration, he declared that he

did it for the daily increase of the memory and veneration of the Passion and death of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that the faithful might be drawn by greater devotion and piety to our Lord's Passion. Pius VII. and Pius IX. expressed the same sentiments, the latter hoping that the festival 'would offer fresh inducements to the faithful to love and embrace the wounded Heart of Him who has loved us and washed us from our sins in His Blood.' Inspired, it would seem, by the same sentiments as St. Bernard, he goes on to say most feelingly: 'Who is there so hard-hearted as not to be moved to love that most sweet Heart that was transfixed and wounded with a lance for the very purpose of providing therein for our soul a kind of hiding-place and refuge where it might be received and protected from the attack and snares of our enemies? Who is there that will not be moved to all possible devotion towards that most Sacred Heart from whose wound there flowed, as from a fountain, blood and water destined for our life and salvation?'

Leo XIII. raised the feast-day to the rite of a first-class festival, and later on (April 2, 1899) approved for use in the whole Church the Litany of the Sacred Heart, which breathes so fervent a spirit of piety. Later on again, in the decree (April 4, 1900) by which he sanctioned the holy scapular of the Sacred Heart, he declared in these words the object of devotion to the Sacred Heart: 'The Divine sacraments and religious celebrations tend in an admirable manner towards the constant maintenance and reign in the hearts of men of the charity of God diffused by

the Holy Ghost. Among these celebrations should be reckoned the solemnity instituted by the Church in honour of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, by which not only is the heart of the *Son of God and man* put before us to be adored and glorified, but there is also renewed in a symbolical way the memory of that Divine love by which the same Only-begotten Son of God assumed human nature, and, becoming obedient unto death, furnished men with the example of every virtue, and showed Himself meek and humble of Heart.'

We learn, then, from these authentic sources what we should propose to ourselves in practising this devotion. We give, by reason of the hypostatic union, supreme adoration not only to our Lord's Divinity, but also to His sacred Humanity, and therefore to His Body and Blood, to His hands and feet and side, and to His Sacred Heart. Whatever belongs to His Being, as He is Divine, is adorable. The object of our adoration in this devotion is the Sacred Heart itself—the very Heart that had compassion on the multitude, that loved Lazarus and his sisters, and the young man with great possessions who declined to leave them for our Lord's sake (St. Mark x. 21); the Heart that felt for so many afflicted persons who sought relief, that did not despise sinners, but drew them to Itself, and that supported the head of St. John at the Last Supper; the same Sacred Heart that was agonizing in the garden, and that was pierced on the cross. In our devotion we venerate and adore that very Heart of Jesus, which is meek and humble, ever loving us, and the seat of every virtue and perfection.

The Sacred Heart is the object not only of our adoration, but also of our admiration. Our Divine Lord came into the world not only to reveal to us by His teaching the love of His heavenly Father for men (St. John iii. 16), but also to display to us through His sacred Humanity the Divine perfections. He said to one of His Apostles: 'He that seeth Me, seeth the Father also' (St. John xiv. 9); and St. Paul tells us that God has now spoken to us by His Son, who is 'the brightness of His glory and the figure of His substance' (Heb. i. 3). How noble and how admirable, then, must that Heart be which portrays for us the perfections—the goodness, mercy, and love—of the heavenly Father!

What shall we say, in the first place, of the goodness of the Sacred Heart? Our Lord said: 'A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good' (St. Luke vi. 45). His own Heart was not barren; its goodness and fruitfulness are seen in His virtues and works. When St. John the Baptist sent messengers to ask Him if He was the Messiah, our Lord did not entertain them with long discourses, but He pointed to His works. 'Go, and relate to John,' He said, 'what you have heard and seen: the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the Gospel preached to them' (St. Matt. xi. 4, 5). All these admirable works manifested the truth of His mission and the goodness of the Sacred Heart. His goodness went even to the shedding of His precious Blood for the salvation of all men.



The Holy Scriptures proclaim Christ to be the Rock—the rock that was struck by Moses in the desert was a figure of Christ. Moses, by God's command, struck the rock, and there issued from it refreshing water for the parched Israelites. Christ, our Divine Redeemer, having completed His sacrifice, hung dead upon the cross, when the cruel soldier pierced His adorable side with a lance, and, driving it in, pierced His Sacred Heart. How wanton an outrage was this! How was it resented? Even as the rock in the desert gave from its side the refreshing water to save the people of Israel from death, so from the Sacred Heart of Jesus there issued, for all His followers travelling through the desert of this life to the promised land of life eternal, the refreshing waters of mercy, sanctification, and salvation. This is what we understand by the prophet's words: 'You shall draw waters with joy out of the Saviour's fountains' (Isa. xii. 3). In other words, there are prepared, through the infinite merits of our Saviour's death, numberless heavenly graces of sanctity, pardon, strength, peace, joy, hope, and consolation to sustain, sanctify, and save God's elect. They are prepared for all, but, alas! all will not avail themselves of them. Thus is manifested to us the surpassing goodness of the Sacred Heart; and our Lord does not weary of dealing with us, notwithstanding our unfaithfulness and inconstancy, but ever invites us to seek His holy grace. His Heart is ever the same: 'Jesus Christ, yesterday, and to-day; and the same for ever' (Heb. xiii. 8).

Let us now, in the second place, consider the

mercy of the Sacred Heart. If It is the source of such unspeakable goodness, It is also the well-spring of our Lord's most tender mercy. How great is that mercy! Holy David sang: 'The Lord is gracious and merciful, patient and plenteous in mercy: the Lord is sweet to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works' (Ps. cxliv. 8, 9). When St. Peter upon an occasion asked our Lord how often he might be expected to forgive his brother, deeming it more than enough if he forgave him seven times, our Lord answered: 'I say not to thee till seven times, but till seventy times seven times' (St. Matt. xviii. 22). The measure of His mercy to us surpasses even that. When He came to save us from sin and everlasting death, it embraced the whole human race. How hopeless would have been man's doom if our Lord had not become his Redeemer!

How deeply we are touched by the mercy of the Sacred Heart during our Lord's missionary career! Where others condemned, He pardoned. He associated with publicans and sinners to win them to God. The thought of pardon for the woman taken in adultery never entered the minds of her accusers, but our Lord would not condemn her. The Magdalen at His feet heard only words to console her. St. Peter after his fall met only a glance that moved him to tears and repentance. The thief crucified at our Lord's side on Calvary was assured of Paradise, and *through a special mercy* became a Saint.

We have, every one of us, our own experience of the plenteous mercy of the Sacred Heart. How

many times, and in what measure, it has been displayed towards us! The sacrament of Penance is a revelation of mercy embracing in its consoling teaching the mystery of Divine forgiveness. Men approach it again and again with the same sins, and sometimes with even greater guiltiness than usual, and go away absolved. Consider, too, the mercy of the Sacred Heart towards persistent sinners. What forbearance and long-suffering our Lord exercises in their regard! What is He waiting for? Why does He not strike? He waits for the sinner's conversion, and He will wait until the last decreed invitation to repentance has been rejected.

We should ever bear in mind, in considering the mercy of the Sacred Heart, that mercy is not shown us because of any merit or right of ours, but because our Lord Himself has paid the price of our reconciliation. St. Paul says: 'Without the shedding of blood there is no remission' (Heb. ix. 22). It would seem just that man himself should fulfil this condition of pardon; but no. Our Lord who had been offended, to whom satisfaction was due, and with whom it rested to bestow the pardon, became Himself our Mediator, shedding His own most precious Blood to merit the forgiveness of man's sin. From out of the Sacred Heart, the foundation of infinite and inexhaustible merit, came the Blood which was the price of His reconciliation.

Let us now pass on to consider, in the third place, the love of the Sacred Heart. We cannot adequately describe what is indescribable, or measure what is immeasurable, so no words can tell the full character

or extent of the love of the Sacred Heart. Speaking of it Himself, our Lord said: 'As the Father hath loved Me, I also have loved you' (St. John xv. 9). It was a love unto suffering and even unto death. 'Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends' (St. John xv. 13). This is the kind of love He has shown us (Gal. ii. 20).

The love of the Sacred Heart also induces our Lord to linger with us in the sacrament of the Real Presence, which we may regard as the lasting memorial of His love. We must ever admire this truly Divine conception and invention of His unspeakable love. We seem to see in this mystery a realization of what is written in the Book of Proverbs: 'My delights were to be with the children of men' (Prov. viii. 31), and of our Lord's promise to His Apostles: 'Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world' (St. Matt. xxviii. 20). The most loving Heart of our Saviour is ever with us in the Blessed Sacrament.

There is also an abiding with the individual soul—with you and with me; this is in Holy Communion. Love leads our Lord to become our spiritual food, and to unite Himself to us. He tells us Himself what is realized when we receive Him, for He says: 'He that eateth My Flesh and drinketh My Blood, abideth in Me and I in him.'

When we contemplate this special mystery of the love of the Sacred Heart, we seem raised above the realms of earth and everyday life. We are dazed by the wonders it presents to our mind, captivated by the Divine condescensions, and overawed by the

nearness of God's hidden majesty. All this, however, does not make us shrink back and try to escape from the secret embraces of our Saviour's love, but, on the contrary, impresses us with a holy persuasiveness that leads us forward and, with sweet and gentle force, compels us to love. Holy Communion is our consolation and delight, and the peace and joy of soul which it imparts to us are not of earth but of heaven. Herein we see a realization of the consoling promise contained in the words of our Lord: 'Come to Me all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you' (St. Matt. xi. 28).

From what we have been considering you learn the character of devotion to the Sacred Heart; you see what Divine mysteries it leads us to value and commemorate; you recognise the twofold object of the devotion, namely, the very Heart Itself and the love It displays; and you acknowledge that we owe our Lord's most loving Heart the worship of our adoration and admiration. It is only becoming that you should now consider how you ought to be affected towards this devotion in order that it may have some practical influence upon your manner of life. Study the words of the spouse in the Canticles: 'Put me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm' (Cant. viii. 6), and let this seal be your love of the Sacred Heart. Devotion to the Sacred Heart must be practical, not emotional. It should captivate your affections by taking possession of your heart, which is the citadel of the soul, the seat of the affections, and the moving spring of your actions; it would then rule your whole conduct. The first seal

would thus be on your heart, and the second on your arm; and thus would your life be brought under the dominion and influence of our Lord's love.

There are certain practices by which you should seek to foster devotion to the Sacred Heart. You would do well to manifest your devotion by acts of love of the Sacred Heart, and by consecrating to It yourselves and your works; by receiving Holy Communion in Its honour, and by prayers and devotions tending to honour It, especially on days consecrated to this devotion; by having near you and duly venerating a picture or statue of the Sacred Heart; by meditating upon Its virtues, character, and works, thus setting It before you for imitation; and, finally, by putting into practice the lessons It teaches. If you were also to wear the scapular of the Sacred Heart, it would help to remind you of your consecration to It, and it would bring upon you many spiritual blessings. The virtues of the Sacred Heart on which we chiefly meditate are our Lord's love for men seen in the Incarnation and Passion and in the Holy Eucharist, His obedience unto death, and His meekness and humility.

Would that the devotion were practised in this way by all our Lord's followers! What happy and consoling results might then be expected! The Holy Spirit says in the *Canticle of Canticles*: 'Many waters cannot quench charity, neither can the floods drown it; if a man should give all the substance of his house for love, he shall despise it as nothing' (Cant. viii. 7). Ah! why men remain so cold and indifferent, so worldly and sensual, why



they do not become more truly pious and more perfect, is because they do not love our Lord as they ought. Let it not be so with religious. Be assured that the measure of your love, if it is a practical love, will be the measure of your perfection. Listen to the Spouse of your soul saying to you: 'Put Me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm, for love is strong as death.' 'Love Me,' He would seem to say, 'in your heart and will, love Me by all your works, then will you love Me truly, generously, and constantly, and this is the only love that can satisfy Me.'

You cannot expect to be pleasing to the Sacred Heart if your heart is attached inordinately to creatures, but especially if it is attached in any degree to what is wrong. Our Lord has said: 'Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God.' If you would be pleasing to the Lamb of God, who came to take away the sins of the world, your heart must not be defiled by sin. You may always have your failings, and may from time to time offend God by venial sin; but let these falls and failings fill you with confusion and regret, and move you to instant repentance; let there not be any indifference about them that would manifest a disposition of unwillingness to try earnestly to avoid them. St. Paul says: 'What participation hath justice with injustice? or what fellowship hath light with darkness? and what concord hath Christ with Belial?' (2 Cor. vi. 14, 15). Apply these words to the sinful heart, and ask: What union or alliance can it have with the Sacred Heart? It is not, however, pretended

that the heart of any religious strays away so far as completely to separate itself from Christ by mortal sin and the consequent loss of grace; but it is to be feared that at times religious are to be met with who have fallen into a condition of tepidity, faultiness, and non-observance of rule so as even to jeopardize their retention of grace. We read in the Life of Blessed Margaret Mary how our Lord once showed her His Heart torn and pierced by blows, and said: 'See the wounds that I receive from My chosen people. Others are content with striking My Body, but these attack My Heart, which has never ceased to love them.' He went on to explain His meaning, saying: 'My love will at length yield to My anger, to punish these proud souls attached to earthly things, who despise Me, and love what is contrary to Me, who leave Me for creatures, who fly from humility to seek self-esteem, and whose hearts being empty of charity, there remains to them only the name of religious.'

That you may be ever pleasing to the Sacred Heart, be ever desirous of purity of heart; strive ever to stifle any affection towards what is sinful or even what is unbecoming in a religious, and ever regard sin as a plague-spot, and an impediment to all good and to your true happiness. Let the thought of the holiness and love of the Sacred Heart move you ever to strive to make your heart more worthy of It.

In conclusion, I say, consider what Heart that is which is the object of your adoration, admiration, and love. Oh, see It in our Lord's infancy winning

for Itself the hearts of men, drawing the shepherds, the wise men, holy Simeon, and Anna, but, above all, the pure hearts of Mary and Joseph! See It at Nazareth, a model of obedience, humility, assiduity, recollection, and conformity with God's designs during so many years of retirement and toil. See It during our Lord's missionary career, so tender and compassionate, so zealous yet patient, rejecting none—not even great sinners—but receiving all: 'The bruised reed He shall not break, and smoking flax He shall not extinguish' (St. Matt. xii. 20); teaching all, and performing works of mercy for the most abandoned. See It, too, in the sacred Passion, so silent, patient, and loving, yielding the last drop of Its Blood for man's salvation, and opened after death to be a fountain of grace for all mankind.

Study the Sacred Heart in all these stages of our Lord's life; but—O faithful Heart!—It still beats, still loves, still works. Still does our Lord's loving voice call out to His wandering sheep; still are His desirous arms stretched out to His prodigal children; still do His tender eyes turn their glance of mute reproach on His faithless followers to move them to repentance; still does He offer Himself as a victim to God on our altars; still does He nourish souls with the Eucharistic food; still does His Sacred Heart beat warm with love of men; still, therefore, does He show His precious Wounds to His heavenly Father, pleading powerfully for mercy; and, though men's ingratitude and heedlessness date back from the beginning of time and threaten to continue to the end, Jesus still remains our Advocate with the

Father, and copious streams of mercy, grace, and every kind of blessing descend from heaven to earth. How truly, then, has St. John said: 'Having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them unto the end'!

Your retreat is now drawing to a close; as a fruit of it you are determined that this love of the Sacred Heart shall not be in vain as far as you are concerned, you feel its attraction, you are inspired with sentiments of gratitude and of confidence, and you are determined, by God's grace, to meet its claims. You hear our Lord say to you: 'Give Me thy heart, and let thy eyes keep My ways' (Prov. xxiii. 26). You consecrate to Him with your heart and its affections, also your thoughts, desires, words, contradictions, sufferings, and all your works; you meditate upon His life and teaching; you embrace dutifully all the appointments of His will; and now, being wholly His, you are resolved, with His help, ever to walk dutifully in the secure path of your religious vocation, keeping your eyes fixed in spirit upon your heavenly Lord, in whose Sacred Heart you place all your trust and your firm hope of salvation.\*

\* 'In eo omnes collocandæ spes: ex eo hominum petenda atque expectanda salus.' — LEO XIII., *Encyclical Letter* of May 25, 1899.

## XXI.

### *LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOUR.*

‘If we love one another, God abideth in us, and His charity is perfected in us.’—1 ST. JOHN iv. 12.

THERE are three things without which true religious life cannot be, namely, piety, by which our heart is given to God; obedience, by which we recognize right authority and religiously submit ourselves to it; and charity, by which our heart goes out to our neighbour. There is a special sacredness about charity, for it is the bond that, grace accompanying, unites us all in one body to the Divine Head, Christ. We may say that the great prototype of this bond is the Divinity Itself. As there are Three Persons in one God, so are there many persons in the one body, the mystical Body of God the Son. ‘For as the body is one, and hath many members; and all the members of the body, whereas they are many, yet are one body: so also is Christ’ (1 Cor. xii. 12). The Apostle discourses at some length upon the mutual relations of the various members, and says there should be no schism amongst them, and he then portrays what charity is. There is, moreover, a sacredness about charity, because of its place in the Divine Law for we see given in one command the obligation

to love God and our neighbour: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself' (St. Luke x. 27).

There is, in the third place, a sacredness about charity because of our Lord's special injunction of this virtue. He has made it the particular sign of discipleship: 'A new commandment I give unto you: that you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one for another' (St. John xiii. 34, 35). He repeated the injunction more than once, to show how earnestly he demanded this proof of His disciples' obedience (St. John xv. 12, 17).

You would do well, before you leave the retreat, to weigh the obligations of charity. It may seem to you that you are not much at fault in respect of these obligations; but if you reflect you may see reason to believe that, of your weekly faults, one-third are against the virtue of piety, another third against the requirements of obedience, and the remaining third against charity.

The ground and motive of this virtue are seen when we describe charity as the love of our neighbour for God's sake, and the manner of it when we say that we are required to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. Charity should not, then, be regarded as a kind of benevolence that we exercise when it suits ourselves, or when we count upon some gain therefrom.



The motive of charity must be supernatural. If our benevolence towards our neighbour is not raised above what is only natural, if it is actuated by only natural virtue, it will not merit any reward in heaven. The highest motive of our charity is that God commands it. If we are desirous of fulfilling this command, our charity will not be determined by considerations of the person towards whom it is to be exercised, or of the nature of what we are required to do, but first and chiefly by the consideration of the Divine command. We ask ourselves if, in the case before us, it is God's command that we should perform a certain act of charity. If we believe that it is God's command, we shall sin against charity if we fail to perform the act. There are, however, cases, and these may be even more numerous, when we do not consider that there is a strict obligation to perform certain kind acts, but in which we believe that their performance would be pleasing to God. In these cases we would do well, for God's sake, to perform them. In all these cases, having God chiefly before our mind, we shall not act according to our own preferences—to our likes and dislikes—or according to circumstances of cost and facility, but from a supernatural motive, and our charity will merit a heavenly reward. St. Francis of Sales says: 'We must not love our neighbour merely because he is virtuous, or because we hope he may become so, but because God commands us to do so.'

Sometimes persons are kind to their neighbour because he has been kind to them, because he is of a temperament similar to theirs, because he has attrac-

tive qualities, because he is related to them, is of the same nationality, or comes from the same locality, or because they hope to gain some earthly advantage in return for their affection or kindness. Such motives belong to the order of nature; there is nothing supernatural about them. Kindness, therefore, actuated by any such motives, would not be in the order of that charity which is exercised for the love of God. Persons who are drawn to show affection or kindness towards others by such motives should purify them by higher considerations, namely, by determining to show kindness, first and chiefly, because it will be pleasing to God. Let them call to mind our Lord's words: 'If you love them that love you, what reward shall you have? do not even publicans this? And if you salute your brethren only, what do you more? do not also the heathens this?'

Natural or sentimental affection does not lift men up as does supernatural charity. It is seen to be often interested, and measured by the satisfaction it affords to those who feel it or show it. It leads men to love the creature for the creature's sake and not for God's sake, and it will leave many unloved and uncared for. On the other hand, supernatural charity lifts up the soul; it is more effective and more meritorious, and it is universal, embracing every creature for God's sake. Sometimes natural affection is not reciprocated, and often, when this is the case, it cools and ceases, if it is not changed for dislike; but supernatural charity does not weary, as it looks for its reward rather from God than from

man. 'Charity,' St. Paul says, 'beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things; charity never falleth away' (1 Cor. xiii. 7, 8). God Himself is the model of our charity, and this is what St. John wishes us to bear in mind where he says: 'By this hath the charity of God appeared towards us, because God hath sent his Only-begotten Son into the world, that we may live by Him. . . . If God hath so loved us, we also ought to love one another' (1 St. John iv. 9, 11).

The commandment of charity claims continual obedience; it makes a constant demand upon your religiousness, generosity, and self-sacrifice, for your neighbour is everywhere and is everyone. You must extend your charity not only to those who are associated with you in religion, and who have the first claim upon it, but also to all, both young and old, whom you meet with in fulfilling your various duties—therefore to externs, to rich and poor, to those in authority over you, and to those who may be dependent upon you.

Having studied what should be the motive of your charity, you come now to ask in what manner it should be practised, seeing that you are to love your neighbour as you love yourself. You are, in the first place, to recognize his rights to your charity by reason of his being a fellow-disciple and a member of the same body. We have seen that charity among our Lord's followers is to be their distinguishing mark. Your neighbour is not, then, to be treated as a stranger, but as a disciple, and if you so treat him, every little act of kindness shown

towards him will be considered by our Lord as shown towards Himself. 'Whosoever,' our Lord said, 'shall give to drink to one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, amen I say to you, he shall not lose his reward' (St. Matt. x. 42). When announcing the happy sentence that will be passed on the last day upon all who have performed the works of mercy, He declared that the King will say to the just: 'Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me' (St. Matt. xxv. 40). You should, then, in dealing with your neighbour, remember the light in which our Lord bids you to regard him; this should, on the one hand, help you to restrain all unkind feelings, and prevent you from causing him pain, while, on the other hand, it should lead you to help him or to sympathize with him in his needs. You should wish every member of the family to be provided for and to receive due consideration. St. James says that your neighbour is a 'brother or sister' (ii. 15); in your manner of dealing with him you should treat him as such.

You should, in the second place, follow the golden rule laid down by our Lord—a rule also accepted by the 'law and the prophets' (St. Matt. vii. 12): 'As you would that men should do to you, do you also to them in like manner' (St. Luke vi. 31). Although you may not be obliged to love your neighbour with the same measure or degree of charity that you entertain for yourself, you must be prepared, as occasion arises, to love him in all those ways wherein you wish others to love you. The heroic

love displayed by St. Paul indicates the extent to which charity may go. He wrote to the Corinthians: 'I most gladly will spend and be spent myself for your souls; although, loving you more, I be loved less' (2 Cor. xii. 15). And to the Romans: 'I wished myself to be an anathema from Christ for my brethren' (Rom. ix. 3). What is demanded is that you should have the same regard for others that you wish them to entertain for you, and be prepared to do that good to them which you would reasonably expect them to do to you. The good that should be done to your neighbour will therefore extend itself to good opinions entertained, just and kind judgments formed, words of encouragement, advice, sympathy, or warning spoken, little services rendered, temporary relief afforded, character and conduct defended, and success applauded, according as circumstances arise or opportunities offer. You should manifest your desire to live in charity with everyone; you should despise none, and be respectful towards all. St. Paul says: 'Let love be without dissimulation; hating that which is evil, cleaving to that which is good; loving one another with the charity of brotherhood; with honour preventing one another . . . communicating to the necessities of the saints (the faithful); pursuing hospitality; bless them that persecute you; bless, and curse not; rejoice with them that rejoice, weep with them that weep; being of one mind one towards another' (Rom. xii. 9-16). When you study this apostolic teaching, you will be impressed with an exalted idea of charity, and you will recog-

nize the many ways in which it should be practised. You should show interest in your neighbour's welfare, and consideration in all your dealings with him; you should willingly pass over his defects, and speak rather of his good qualities. You should also be willing to see him esteemed, honoured, and even preferred, and you should manifest a forgiving spirit when he has been at fault. Lastly, you should exercise patience with him if he has a difficult or trying character, for there will always be differences of temperament and divergence of views, and other differences arising from training, surroundings, or nationality; but none of these should be allowed to cause a breaking of the sacred bond of charity. St. Francis of Sales says: 'To bear with his imperfections is one of the chief points of the love we owe our neighbour.'

Sufficient has now been said of the manner in which you should manifest your charity; let me, to emphasize the excellence of this virtue, mention the faults that are opposed to it or tend to destroy it. The contrast is striking.

Opposed to charity are bickerings, disputes, seeking to have the last word in an argument, and designedly wounding the feelings of any neighbour; detrimental to it are unkind judgments, ill-judged remarks, and disparagement; likely to lessen it are sullenness, moroseness, and taking offence when none is intended; and destructive of it are quarrels, detraction, envy, jealousy, and display of temper. There have been very sad examples of evil being accomplished as a result of such faults as these;



for instance, when Cain slew his brother through jealousy, and when the brothers of Joseph were envious of him (Gen. xxxvii. 8) and plotted his ruin. Our Lord teaches us how displeasing to God are dissensions where He says: 'If therefore thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath anything against thee, leave there thy offering before the altar, and go first to be reconciled to thy brother, and then coming thou shalt offer thy gift' (St. Matt. v. 23, 24). St. Paul insinuates the same lesson where he says: 'Be of one mind, have peace; and the God of peace and of love shall be with you' (2 Cor. xiii. 11). The beloved disciple, whose discourse ever turned upon the duty of mutual charity, says: 'In this the children of God are manifest and the children of the devil. Whosoever is not just is not of God, nor he that loveth not his brother. . . . Let us love one another, for charity is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God; he that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is charity' (1 St. John iii. 10; iv. 7, 8).

Consider now some of the happy results of charity. It may be said that charity begets charity, for if you show affection for others, they will reciprocate it. Charity should be the bond of all Christians, and especially should it bind together members of a religious community. It helps to bring all into one spirit, both in fostering religious observance and in labouring successfully to accomplish the works of the Institute. Religious union brings peace into a community, and peace tends to piety and edification.

Where there is charity, there is no unworthy emulation or seeking to be above others, so as to enjoy personal advantages or superiority; there is a happy understanding between all the members of the community, one being always ready to assist the other; faults are not carried about, and consideration is shown to all without distinction. Then is realized what is said by David: 'Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity' (Ps. cxxxii. 1).

A certain amount of responsibility for the maintenance of charity rests with superiors. They must judiciously correct any notable breach of charity, being careful not to widen it, but to heal it. They should, moreover, avoid such faults as showing preference for certain sisters; treating some with special kindness, and others with less consideration; readily conceding to some all they ask, while meeting the requests of others with a bad grace, and even refusing them without any good reason; gathering favourites around them, and scarcely ever noticing other particular sisters, causing them to feel that they are not cared for; being always at the disposition of the one, but usually too busy to see the other less favoured sisters; or, finally, dealing harshly in the chapter of faults with any members of the community, or speaking publicly there or elsewhere of various failings that should be corrected privately, according to our Lord's precept: 'If thy brother shall offend against thee, go and rebuke him between thee and him alone' (St. Matt. xviii. 15). Superiors should hold the reins of their office with a just, even,

and kind hand, and carefully avoid particular friendships or partiality, as these things disedify, and cause dissatisfaction and bitterness in the community, and to themselves a loss of confidence and affection.

The teaching of the Apostles, imbibed directly from our Lord, should draw your hearts towards this queen of virtues. Let me select a few passages from their epistles. St. Peter says: 'Before all things have a constant mutual charity among yourselves, for charity covereth a multitude of sins' (1 St. Peter iv. 8). St. John says: 'He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is no scandal in him; but he that hateth his brother is in darkness.' 'He that loveth not, abideth in death. Let us not love in word, nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth.' 'If God hath so loved us, we also ought to love one another; if we love one another, God abideth in us, and His charity is perfected in us' (1 St. John ii. 10, 11; iii. 14, 18; iv. 11, 12). St. Paul says: 'He that loveth his neighbour, hath fulfilled the law' (Rom. xiii. 8). 'Bear ye one another's burdens, and so you shall fulfil the law of Christ' (Gal. vi. 2). 'With all humility and mildness, with patience, supporting one another in charity; careful to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' (Eph. iv. 2, 3). And finally: 'Fulfil ye my joy, that you be of one mind, having the same charity, being of one accord, agreeing in sentiment. Let nothing be done through contention, neither by vain-glory; but in humility let each esteem others better than themselves' (Phil. ii. 2, 3).

Let, then, these holy Apostles teach you the will of

our Lord as to the manner in which you should practise charity. Perhaps you have been at fault, because you have not realized what are the demands of this virtue, or you have not been prepared to satisfy them. Perhaps your affection or kindness has not been sanctified by supernatural motives; or, again, you may have been wanting in charity because your thoughts have been too much centred in yourself. Sometimes the order is reversed, and this is wrong; for persons are seen so far drawn to others as for their sake to run the risk of their own spiritual or temporal ruin. Such affection is inordinate and ill-regulated.\*

It was said of the faithful in the early Church: 'See how these Christians love one another.' They were true to the practice of charity inculcated by the Apostles. If this virtue barely exists in its true vigour in the broad arena of the world, where conflicting interests reduce the efforts of men to so many selfish aims, let it at any rate flourish, and come to full blossom, in the garden of the religious life. Let the sweet scent of this blossom pervade your communities, and your convents will be abodes of piety, good understanding, and peace. There will be a firm bond and vigour, useful work will be done without strife, mutual edification will be given, and

\* 'Rectus ordo requirit ut prius propriam, deinde alienas curare studeas conscientias. Primus quippe pietatis gradus est, de quo scriptum est: Miserere animæ tuæ placens Deo. Ex hoc autem ad miserandum proximum recto jam tramite charitas ordinata procedit; quippe quem ad sui mensuram quisque amare præcipitur.'—S. Bern. ad Brun. ep.

Heaven's blessing will comfort all the members. Then may you say: 'The beams of our houses are of cedar, our rafters of cypress trees' (Cant. i. 16). Selfishness and ambition, contention and wrath, party spirit and envy, will not be there to disturb union and contentment; but imbibing the spirit of the Sacred Heart, you will willingly share one another's labours, joys, sorrows, and prayers, and experience the happiness which makes its home in the abode where charity reigns.

## XXII.

### OUR LADY.

‘ Behold the handmaid of the Lord.’—ST. LUKE i. 38.

IT consoles us to learn from the Fathers of the Church that by God’s will Mary is ever to be honoured, and that, through her hands, blessings are to be showered upon mankind.\* With joy we join with the faithful of every age in taking part in the fulfilment of the prophecy of Mary herself: ‘ Behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed ’ (St. Luke i. 48), and we know that every prophecy in Holy Writ ‘ must needs be fulfilled ’ (Acts i. 16). Devotion to our Lady has ever had a prominent place in the piety of all Catholics. We learn this from the tradition of the Church, the writings of the Fathers, the dedication of Churches to her, the keeping of festivals in her honour, the long use of the Hail Mary, and the devotion of the Holy Rosary practised during several centuries. She is universally honoured in the Church to-day, as is evident from the numberless pilgrims to her shrines, the various confraternities, institutes, and religious Orders placed

\* ‘ Totis ergo medullis cordium, totis præcordiorum affectibus, et votis omnibus Mariam hanc veneremur, quia sic est voluntas Ejus, qui totum nos habere voluit per Mariam.’—ST. BERNARD.



under her patronage, and the number of her statues and pictures seen in Churches, religious houses, and private dwellings in every land. With this unmistakable evidence before us, and remembering that Christ lives ever in His Church (St. Matt. xxviii. 20), and that the Holy Ghost abides with her to direct her and preserve her from all error (St. John xiv. 16; xvi. 13), we are forced to the conclusion that the finger of God is here.

If all Catholics should, following the instincts of their faith, seek to enter into the spirit of the Church in the practice of devotion to Mary, this devotion should especially be enshrined in the heart of all religious. Mary is to them both patroness and model, the custodian of their piety, the protectress of themselves and their Institute, and the beloved Mother under whose fostering care they live and labour. To think of her and to pray to her, to sing hymns in her honour and to listen to her praises, should ever give them joy, and the fruits of their joy and devotion would then be seen in the increase of Divine charity in their heart and of heavenly blessings in their life.

Fervent and touching praises of Mary are found in the writings of the Fathers, as in the works (A.D. 340-444) of St. Ambrose, St. John Chrysostom, St. Augustine and St. Cyril of Alexandria, and especially in those of the Greek Fathers of the seventh and eighth centuries.\* But we are, perhaps,

\* For extracts from the Fathers, see the 'Lessons of the Breviary for the Octave of the Immaculate Conception,' and for all the other Offices of our Lady's festivals.

more familiar with fervid passages from the sermons of St. Bernard and with the devotional works, in more recent times, of St. Alphonsus. Holy Church treasures up all these writings as a part of her tradition, and her children delight to read them or to hear them quoted. Not only do we find in them admirable and instructive titles given to Mary, and useful lessons drawn from the consideration of her dignity, her office, and her life, but they also afford much unction in encouraging us to honour her and to have recourse to her intercession.

As true devotion to our Lady demands at least that we should honour her and invoke her intercession, we will make a few reflections upon these two points.

When the Angel Gabriel had told Mary God's will in her regard in the accomplishment of the mystery of the Incarnation, the interview was closed by those admirable words of Mary: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to thy word.' We will look with reverence upon this holy handmaid raised up by God to be the Mother of His Only-begotten Son, the Queen of Heaven, and the Advocate of men. How truly she declared in her canticle of praise and thanksgiving: 'He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid. . . . He that is mighty hath done great things to me' (St. Luke i. 48, 49)! It is only becoming that we should admire the works of God and recognize the worth of His servants. David said: 'To me Thy friends, O God, are made exceedingly honourable' (Ps. cxxxviii. 17). It is a duty of religion to honour

those whom God has distinguished with His special favours; we therefore reverence and honour the Angels and Saints, but above all the ever-blessed Mother of our Divine Saviour. We honour our Lady because of her exalted dignity and transcendent virtues.

Let us, in the first place, consider Mary's dignity. When God from eternity decreed the Incarnation, He included in this decree the Immaculate Conception and the Divine Maternity. There was not to be one without the other; there was not to be a Divine Jesus without a spotless Mary ever a virgin (Isa. vii. 14; St. Matt. i. 23). Before the accomplishment of the Incarnation there should be the Immaculate Conception. Mary was therefore in the Divine Mind from eternity, and all her privileges, graces, and dignities were included in God's eternal decrees.

The mystery of the Incarnation as thus determined by the most Holy Trinity, and as actually accomplished at the time Divinely appointed, as also God's revelation of it to man, would be incompletely and inconsistently understood if we were to deny to Mary that signal place in God's plans and dispensations which the Catholic Church assigns to her. Holy Church teaches us to reverence her as the Mother of Jesus, our Advocate with Him, and our heavenly Mother. We will, therefore, ever claim for Mary all that honour and devotion which are due to her by reason of these her just titles. Let us love to address her by these titles, which comfort us with the thought of our relationship with her, and let us not be afraid of attributing to her all that is comprised in

them, or be indifferent about trying to understand their true and full meaning. Children rejoice in the honour of their mother, and this honour reflects in some measure upon the children.

In view of Mary's exalted dignity we believe that, as far as a creature could be made worthy of being Mother of God, Mary was, by the profusion of Divine bounty, made worthy. We do not pretend to say what measure of grace was therefore poured out upon her spotless soul, as it is impossible for us to fathom the mystery of God's special dealings with Mary; but we know that, as her dignity surpasses all other dignities, and as her ministry to the Divine will in the Incarnation transcended every other ministry, whether angelic or sacerdotal, it must follow that her soul was not only glorious with the most spotless sinlessness and purity, but was also gifted with the most perfect adornment of every grace.\* This is the sense in which we interpret the Angel's salutation, 'Hail, full of grace.' In Mary, then, not only is there no shadow whatever of faultiness or unseemliness, but she is gifted and adorned with every perfection and beautifulness of which a created being is capable. To her, therefore, we apply the words of the Cantic of Canticles: 'Thou art all fair, and there is not a spot in thee.'

Since there is nothing wanting in her in any grace or excellence, we must proclaim her as, above all others, the wise woman. Of the wise woman Solo-

\* 'Sed præservatam omnino fuisse ab originis labe, et idcirco sublimiori modo redemptam.'—'Breviary,' December 14, Lesson 4.

mon says: 'Thou hast surpassed them all' (Prov. xxxi. 29). Mary surpasses all God's creatures not only in the greatness of her dignity, but also in the exaltedness of her character, the splendour of her gifts, the lustre of her virtues, the sublimity of her sanctity, the unspeakable fervour of her divine love and worship, the magnitude of her achievements, and the indescribable magnificence of her glory. God has in all these ways lavished adornments upon His favourite Daughter, the Mother of His Son, that her excellence may be in every way in keeping with her dignity. There would be some incongruity—a thing inconceivable in God's works and dispensations—if it were not so. These considerations enable us to understand more fully other words in the angel's salutation, 'The Lord is with thee,' for there are special relations existing between God and His well-beloved—He is more intimately with her in the dealings of His love and bounty than with any other creature in heaven or on earth. Therefore did the angel say further in reverent praise and admiration: 'Blessed art thou among women.' He teaches us by his salutation in what spirit and in what terms God would have us address ourselves to Mary; and holy Church has in every age taught her children, in supplicating Mary's intercession, to use the very words uttered by the angel.

Mary's dignity has its fitting crown in the glory bestowed upon her in God's heavenly everlasting kingdom. Passages of Holy Scripture that are usually interpreted as referring to the Church are also read as alluding to our Lady. Amongst them

is the following: 'A great sign appeared in heaven: a Woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars' (Apoc. xii. 1). When we consider that our Lord has said of all His elect: 'Then shall the just shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father' (St. Matt. xiii. 43), it should not be surprising if we picture to ourselves in Mary's case a splendour and magnitude of glory that far surpasses the portion of the rest of the elect and of all the angels. In our admiration, and in our pious faith in her greatness, we style her the Queen of Heaven,\* and we believe that her happiness and glory transcend the blessedness of all the heavenly host by as much as her dignity and merits surpass those of all other celestial creatures.

The Church on earth may be regarded, in respect of its institution and end, as a counterpart of the Church in heaven, and herein, too, we behold a similar preference for our Lady. By reason of her super-eminent dignity and sanctity, the Church pays her superior veneration, this being termed by theologians 'hyperdulia'; but, as we know, all the homage or veneration paid to our Lady and the Angels and Saints is referred to, and redounds to, the honour of God, whose gifts and graces have made them what they are.

We call to mind with tender devotion what we learn in the Holy Scriptures of the praises of Mary while she was on earth, and we rejoice in the recital of her praises found in the writings of the Fathers in

\* 'Regina cœlorum,' 'Regina cœli,' 'Salve Regina,' Antiphons of the Church.



every age since that time, and in the veneration paid her by devout Christians in every land. The angel Gabriel's words of praise and assurance were : ' Hail full of grace, the Lord is with thee ; blessed art thou among women. . . . Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God. . . . The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee ; and therefore also the Holy which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God ' (St. Luke i. 28-35). St. Elizabeth's praise and honour of Mary are contained in the following passage : ' Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb ; and whence is this to me that the Mother of my Lord should come to me ? . . . And blessed art thou that hast believed.'

When holy Simeon blessed Mary and Joseph and uttered his prophecy, which he did addressing himself to Mary, he foretold her sorrows and the devotion they would elicit in the Church, saying : ' And thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed ' (St. Luke ii. 35). The tender relations existing between the Divine Child and His Mother are manifested in the incident of the three days' loss or separation. Upon that occasion, when Jesus had been found, Mary said to Him : ' Son, why hast Thou done so to us ? Behold Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing.' Then the evangelist records that Jesus ' went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them.' Another incident illustrative of the relations between Mother and Son occurred at the marriage in Cana, when both were present at the

feast with which it was celebrated. St. John records the event in these concise terms: 'The wine failing, the Mother of Jesus saith to Him: They have no wine; and Jesus saith to her: Woman, what is it to Me and to thee? My hour is not yet come. His Mother saith to the waiters: Whatsoever He shall say to you, do ye.' Our Lord thereupon wrought the miracle of changing water into wine. St. Luke relates an incident in which a woman in the crowd that was listening to our Lord's discourse, being filled with admiration, raised her voice declaring the blessedness of His Mother (St. Luke xi. 27). The last mention of Mary in the Gospels tells us of her standing by the cross, when Jesus looked down upon her and addressed Himself to her, to recommend St. John to her as a son, saying: 'Woman, behold thy son.'

I have already alluded to the tradition of the Church as evidenced in the writings of the Holy Fathers. These Saints and Doctors of the Church declared that words failed them when they wished to speak of the dignity and greatness of Mary.\* She was also revered and loved by Christian warriors, for we have read how at times their battle-cry was 'For God and our Lady.' The tradition of the Church's

\* 'Quid dicam, aut quid proloquar de præclara et sancta Virgine? Solo enim Deo excepto cunctis superior exstitit.'—ST. EPIPHANIUS.

'Quas tibi laudes fragilitas humani generis persolvat?'—ST. AUGUSTINE.

'Quisnam potuit tuarum laudum præconia explicare, Maria mater et virgo?'—ST. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA.

'Quibus te laudibus cumulabimus, Maria?'—ST. TARASIVS.

devotion is witnessed to in every part of Christendom by numberless churches and abbeys dedicated to the Blessed Virgin under various titles, and by the use of her rosary, the wearing of her scapular, and other pious practices in her honour that have existed for ages in Catholic countries and come down to our own times. Finally, the devotion of the Church to Mary is seen in the dedication of religious Orders, congregations, and institutes to her patronage, as in the case of the Order of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the Servants of Mary, the Institute of Mary, the Institute of Our Lady of Mercy, the Society of Mary, and the Congregation of Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

We have considered our Lady's dignity, the graces bestowed upon her, and the honour in which she is held by reason of her greatness; we have now, in the second place, to reflect upon the honour due to her on account of her transcendent virtues.

Mary's life affords us an admirable lesson. Our Lady had her experiences of periods of calm and of tempest, of rest and of labour, of honour and of contradiction, of joy and of sorrow, and in all these phases of life we see and admire the solidity and brilliancy of her virtue. As a child in the temple, and in that holy sanctuary developing into maidenhood, we picture to ourselves with admiring mind her piety, simplicity, and guilelessness, with that spirit of recollection and reserve that marked her out as being more than an ordinary daughter of Juda. As the spouse of St. Joseph at Nazareth, we reflect upon her purity, modesty, and dutifulness while performing

the domestic duties of their lowly abode and the quiet social duties of her calling. At the coming of the angel we notice her humility and spirit of retirement, but her complete trust in God, and her singular devotedness to His holy will. In her visit to St. Elizabeth we see her practical charity and other virtues called forth in her attendance upon her aged and revered cousin, and, when uttering her canticle of praise, her gratitude to God for all His wonderful works in herself, with fervent thanksgiving attributing to His bounty, and not to any merit of her own, the wonders He had accomplished in her. At Bethlehem we are struck with her admirable conformity in all the Divine arrangements, her spirit of faith, her pious meditations, and her rapturous love of the Infant Jesus. In the temple at her purification, we admire the fervour with which she offers to God her Divine Infant, the Expected of Nations, the calm resignation with which she listens to the prophecies of holy Simeon, and the perfect obedience displayed in her compliance with every point of the law. In Egypt we note her trust and confidence, without undue solicitude, and her ready submission to the trial of a prolonged exile. In the seeking of our Lord during the three days' loss, and in the finding of Him in Jerusalem, we note her silent sorrow, accompanied by dutiful and anxious search, and her tender reproaches to elicit from her Son an explanation that would comfort her mind; and, finally, the joy and satisfaction she experiences when He becomes her companion once more in subjection to her maternal authority. In the life at Nazareth, during the

following eighteen years, we admire her assiduity in domestic labour, the piety with which she treasured up the words that fell from the lips of Jesus, and her practical study of the lessons of His life. During our Lord's missionary work, we see her so patient in her almost constant separation from Him, her devotedness when permitted to minister to His wants, and her joy of soul in hearing recounted all His wonderful deeds and discourses. Then came the dark and bitter hours of the sacred Passion; in those hours the incomparable meekness, forgiveness, and patience of the Divine Victim on the cross had their counterpart in Mary, and she, with her soul deeply pierced with a sword of sorrow, by a supreme act of worship united herself with her Son in the sacrifice of Himself that He offered to the Majesty of God to atone for the sins of men. In those hours of harrowing sorrow and desolation, ending with the closing of the holy sepulchre, we see displayed Mary's maternal devotedness, her surpassing love of God and of men, and her more than heroic courage and resignation.

We have but touched upon, in a brief and passing way, the virtues of our Lady in our hurried review of her life. Her brilliant example instructs us in wisdom and draws us to God, and therefore, as well as on account of her dignity, she has ever been honoured in the Church. It is written of the wise man: 'Nations shall declare his wisdom, and the Church shall show forth his praise' (Ecclus. xxxix. 14); but as Mary excelled all others in wisdom and in every virtue, she is above all others deserving

of everlasting remembrance and honour. It is appointed by God that she shall receive honour from men throughout all time (St. Luke i. 48), and we joyfully and dutifully join with the Saints and devout men of every age in praising her name and extolling her virtues. Let it at the same time be our care and our study to keep her virtuous example before us, and to endeavour to imitate it. She is the first and truest follower of our Lord, and she should therefore be to us, above all others, a pattern in learning the lessons of His life and teaching. Holy Church teaches us devotion to Mary, not only that we may thereby please our Lord by our dutiful reverence of His Mother, but also that we may draw profit for our souls by our admiration, love, and imitation of her virtues.

True devotion to our Lady demands that, in the first place, we should honour her. We have seen that we should do so on account of her dignity and her virtues. It demands that, in the next place, we should invoke her intercession.

It is of faith that the prayer of the just, whether in heaven or on earth, is acceptable to God in behalf of themselves and of others. God was pleased to receive and hear the prayer of Job for his three friends: 'My servant Job shall pray for you, his face I will accept' (Job xlii. 8), and the prayer of Onias when he prayed for Heliodorus (2 Macc. iii. 33). No one, then, should be surprised at the fervour and constancy with which Mary's intercession is sought. We read how Ozias and the ancients sought the prayers of Judith, saying: 'Now, therefore, pray for us, for thou art a holy woman, and one fearing God'



(Judith viii. 29). With far greater confidence do we invoke Mary's prayers, full of faith as we are in the power of her intercession, and of hope of receiving numberless blessings through it.

We solicit the favour of Heaven through the prayers of the Saints, not that in this way our needs may be made known to God, but that through their prayers and merits He may grant a favourable answer to our petitions (2a 2æ, q. 83, a. 4). As Mary's merits surpass those of all the Saints, we consequently attribute to her intercession greater power and efficacy than to that of any of the other Saints. We believe, too, that her fidelity and constancy in watching over her spiritual children are so great that she will not desist in her pleading in their behalf until she obtains the granting of her petition, or until she is assured that her client is unworthy of the Divine mercy. Our confidence in the power of our Lady's intercession is strengthened by the abundant record of the favours obtained in every age, and in our own time, by those who have had recourse to her.

Since God has been pleased to teach us through holy Church to seek the prayers of the Saints, and to have above all confidence in those of our Lady, we are full of hope that our recourse to her intercession will result in our obtaining many favours. Recourse to her would have long since died out in the Church if the faithful had not experienced benefit resulting from it, but what do we see? We note with joy and satisfaction the increase of devotion to Mary in every land, and we read of many special favours received upon the occasion of pilgrimages to her shrines, and in

answer to novenas made in her honour. There is therefore in the Church a universal sentiment of confidence in Mary's intercession, and the faithful invoke it to solicit blessings both spiritual and temporal.

St. Bernard styles our Lady the 'Star of the Sea,' and he bids whoever is tossed about on the stormy sea of life ever to look up for succour to this bright star, no matter what or how great his wants and difficulties may be—'Respice stellam, voca Mariam.' Holy Church teaches us to call upon Mary as the 'Help of Christians,' and she gratefully records the special protection and help she has experienced from our Lady's prayers in times of serious danger. It cannot, then, be said of us that we have the true spirit of devotion to our Lady if we do not seek the help of her prayers.

In religious Institutes this devotion is both understood and practised, and happy fruits are reaped from it. Ask yourselves if you think sufficiently of the honour and love you owe to Mary, your Heavenly Mother and Patroness, and if you manifest these sentiments by your reverence and devotion. Ask yourselves if you have recourse to her intercession, not only in times of special difficulty, but also daily in all your works. Be true to Mary in your character as her spiritual children, and you will have the consolation of experiencing the benefits of her loving patronage. She will not weary of interceding for you with her Divine Son while you do not weary of asking her prayers and of cultivating devotion to her. Imitate the Saints and all her devout clients in their sentiments of reverence, love,

and confidence, and like them you will find this devotion a source of comfort and encouragement.

With St. Bernard, then, I say: While you are on the stormy sea of this life, look up to the Star—to Mary. You have left the ways of the world, and now, sheltered from its storms, you live in the peace of the shaded valley; ever look up to the Star shining brightly over it—to Mary. She is the ‘Mirror of Justice’ and the ‘Cause of our Joy.’ If you should be in the dark night of sorrow, still look up to the Star—to Mary, for she is the ‘Comfort of the Afflicted.’ And even if you should have the misfortune to be in sin, oh, even then do not despair, but look up to the Star—to Mary; seek reconciliation through her prayers, for she is the ‘Refuge of Sinners.’

‘Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners;’ how often we say this prayer! O Mary, pray for us, weak, fickle, and sinful creatures that we are; for we ever need your intercession. ‘Pray for us now’—now while we labour and suffer in this land of our exile, now while we are engaged in the battle of life. Pray for us also ‘at the hour of our death’—pray for us especially then, for it will be the hour of victory or of defeat. Cast over us then the mantle of your maternal protection to save us from the darts of the Evil One, and from every danger to our everlasting salvation. ‘After this our exile show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb’; may we then, O heavenly Queen and Protectress, aided by your powerful intercession, attain to the bright, unceasing vision of the glory of your Divine Son, together with you and all the Blessed to love Him and praise Him for ever.

## CLOSE OF THE RETREAT.

### XXIII.

#### HEAVEN.

‘Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him.’—I COR. ii. 9.

ONE of the most solid consolations in our present pilgrimage, and one of the most efficacious inducements to our perseverance in God’s service, is the revealed doctrine of the everlasting reward. There lies beyond the horizon of this desert that we are now traversing the ‘promised land’—the kingdom of heaven promised as a reward for the just. Let us at the close of the retreat fix our minds for a while upon this comforting revelation.

We may strive to learn from the admirable display of creation around us what we may expect to behold in the heavenly kingdom. The beautiful objects and scenes that are met in every department of Nature, and that fill man with wonder and even attach his heart to this land of his exile, afford but a very distant idea of the beauty and grandeur of the realms of bliss. It is enough that the beautiful things now seen

and enjoyed should tell man of the infinite wisdom, greatness, power, and glory of God, who created them all, and that they should raise his mind and heart to a desire of, and hope of attaining to, those ineffable joys and riches which are prepared for him in his heavenly home. In this world man beholds with wonder and admiration the majestic flow of great rivers, the imposing loftiness of extensive mountain ranges, the wide expanse of verdant forests, and the attractiveness of far-reaching meadows intersected by streamlets and hedgerows; he sees the countless flowers of every hue, and lawns with shrubs and fountains, and rich vineries and smiling orchards; and, finally, he beholds the beautiful palaces and parks of kings and nobles, and the magnificence of great cities. Then, raising his eyes, he is struck with wonder at the blue sky and the fleecy clouds, the glorious sun, the placid moon, and the brilliant stars in countless constellations and at fabulous distances. All this is enrapturing to a lover of Nature. It is matter of regret that men are to be found who so attach themselves to these things created as to neglect the worship of the great Creator, and who so love this beautiful land of exile as to forget the heavenly everlasting home to which they should be hastening. What is beautiful in this world admits of some description, but in the kingdom of God's rewards the beauty of everything is so transcendent that St. Paul, who was caught up to heaven, could find no words to describe it, so that he had to content himself with saying: 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into

the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him.'

This heaven is termed one of the last ends of man. It is the object of our most religious hope—an aim and object that affords the greatest encouragement to virtue, and consoling support under the trials and labours of our exile on earth. I wish now to offer you a few thoughts about it, in order to help you to realize, if only in some small degree, the delights it offers, and to stimulate your desire and determination to strive earnestly and constantly to reach it.

I purpose showing that the heavenly reward is such as to afford satisfaction and enjoyment for our mind, and heart, and senses—in a word, for soul and body. The first consideration will therefore be that heaven, by reason of the full knowledge there enjoyed, is the great good to satisfy our mind; the second consideration, that heaven, by reason of the possession of the Sovereign Good, together with the glory and repose accompanying this possession, is the great good to satisfy our heart; and the third consideration, that heaven, by reason of the enjoyment there of all true and holy, sensible pleasures, is the great good to satisfy our body—for in heaven the body shall be glorified and rendered immortal, and shall receive its share in the promised reward. You see, then, that the heavenly reward will comprise knowledge, the possession of God, glory, repose, and sensible pleasures, according to our new condition of being and the everlasting kingdom in which we shall be established.

In the first place, dwell upon the thought that in



heaven we shall enjoy knowledge. Truth is the object of man's longing—he desires it and seeks it. The mind is not satisfied by indistinctness or doubt, and it is unwilling to remain in ignorance; it wants to know, and only true knowledge can satisfy it. How enrapturing it is to the mind when truth, coming out of obscurity or mystery, reveals itself, and is perceived and understood! It really satisfies the mind, because truth is stable and unchangeable—it cannot cease to be nor can it be other than it is. We have read how the sages of ancient days fled from the tumult of cities, to seek, contemplate, study, enjoy, and teach natural and metaphysical sciences. We know that to the Saints the truths of our holy religion and all heavenly doctrine were as a rich treasure upon which their mind fed with a holy relish, even casting them at times into preternatural ecstasies. To us, too, the teachings of truth are attractive and persuasive. Thus, when the orator unravels views of it with which we are not familiar, or teaches our mind what we have not known or reflected on, we become wrapt in attention, and we imbibe the lessons with untold satisfaction. How great, then, shall our joy be when in the glory of heaven, where there is no cloud and where there can be no obscurity, we shall feed upon truth itself! We shall there see it, not in the very limited sphere in which it is disclosed to us in this life, but in that vast vision whose horizon is without bound—in the whole comprehension of things past and present, visible and invisible, real or intelligible—and with a perception that shall be distinct, full, and intimate,

leaving nothing to be desired. This teaching is conveyed to us by St. Paul's words: 'We see now through a glass in a dark manner, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know even as I am known' (1 Cor. xiii. 12).

Man in this world looks around him and strives to comprehend the whole scope of everything that falls under his vision, and to bring within the control of his knowledge even the unseen but created forces which operate so importantly upon all that he sees. He seeks to understand the nature of all things, and to acquire, by study and research in all the wonders around him, a knowledge of cause and effect. Alas! even if he gives his whole lifetime to acquiring this knowledge, he succumbs to death before he has collected more than a few crumbs of science, leaving most things uninvestigated, and many of those he has examined only partially known. Yet, although this is so, his mind experiences wonder and delight in considering the beautiful things spread out before him by the Divine Creator and the secret forces that regulate them, and he readily acknowledges that human talent and ingenuity sink into insignificance before the tableau of creation. Such, then, is the condition of man's knowledge in this world; but in heaven it will be perfected, and we shall intuitively comprehend there things that have not yielded to our laborious studies and investigations here; and there all this knowledge of matter, of all the objects on earth and in the skies, and of all that comprises the various orders of creation, shall delight our mind with all the wonders therein displayed.

If we pass to the laws of Divine providence in the government of the world and to the kingdom of morals, we find ourselves face to face in this life with what is often mysterious and unaccountable. Many men have suffered shipwreck of the faith because they strove to fathom the mystery and bring it under the rule of their ideas, and could not. In the order of Nature we meet with earthquakes and devastating storms, and elements of disorder and destruction, of disease, decay, and death, of which the unbeliever in vain seeks a satisfactory explanation; but what are these things in comparison with the mysterious dispensations met with in this higher order? Even the faithful marvel at the protracted rule of unbelieving conquerors, at the continued rejection of faith, at the long-suffering accorded to the wicked, at the struggles and trials of the just, and at the vicissitudes of the Church and the triumph of evil. We are here compelled by motives of religion to suspend our judgment, and to follow principles and quote maxims dictated by the teaching of the Holy Spirit; but at the same time we remain in ignorance, for God reserves for the life to come the elucidation of the mystery. Then shall break upon us the glorious vision of the truth, and we shall admire all the magnificence of the Divine designs, the wisdom of God's arrangements, the goodness of His providence, the tenderness of His mercy, and the evenness of His justice. With this revelation the mystery shall vanish, and we shall see how, in all God's dealings with His creatures, there were ever displayed His

infinite perfections in the wondrous ways of their manifestation. We shall recognize how God drew good out of evil, and how in all things He ever sought His own glory, which was served by the sufferings of the martyrs, the contradictions of the just, the oppression of the faithful, the trials of the virtuous, the persecution of His Church, and the calamities that occurred in various countries.

We come, lastly, to the region of faith and the knowledge of supernatural truths. In this world we are delighted to hear lessons drawn from those holy Scriptures that unveil many mysteries and treat of God's dealings with men ; we read with pious interest books of spiritual instruction, and with instinctive reverence and attention we listen to the voice of holy Church ; but, after all, how much do we know ? To what extent do we, or can we, in this life realize the mysteries of our holy faith ? Are they not to us more or less as a sealed book ? The bright day of heavenly illumination shall yet dawn ; and then, as far as our created intelligence can, we shall in the light of glory see and comprehend the mystery of the Divine Unity and Trinity, and the glories of the Divine attributes and perfections. We shall contemplate the marvellous glory given to God by the Incarnation, the untold mysteries of which shall then in all their details be revealed to us. We shall then look upon Bethlehem, Nazareth, Calvary, and the Divine Eucharist in a new light of enrapturing wonder. It behoves us now, while awaiting this enlarged and lucid vision of the truth, to walk humbly but faithfully in the path of God's teaching through His

Church. The proud man would fain handle the sublime mysteries of revelation like the easy lessons of common science ; and because they do not display their true meaning under this profane treatment, he goes to the fatal extreme of unbelief. He fails to understand that the glorious reward promised in heaven must be won by the humble submission of his proud intellect to the teachings of revelation, for the reception of which his mind should be becomingly disposed. These teachings do not sink into the souls of such as are proud, self-sufficient, worldly, and carnal, but of such as are docile and religious, ready to become followers of Christ crucified, and doers as well as hearers of the word.

We have dwelt sufficiently for our purpose on the delights of knowledge that shall be a portion of the heavenly reward, and we will now consider, in the second place, that in heaven man's heart will be fully and for ever satisfied by the possession of the Sovereign Good. There shall he enjoy the unspeakable delights of pure love ; for the love of God, as a torrent, will inundate his soul, which will expand to receive it and reciprocate it. The purest and holiest earthly love can bear no proportion, in its intensity or delights, to the immense and ravishing love that will flood the soul at the sight and possession of the Sovereign Good. In heaven man shall see and love his heavenly Father, in whom he will recognize his loving Creator, his bountiful Benefactor, and his merciful God. This is the greatest of all rewards.

We long also to see God's Saints. We have

heard of their virtues and admired their works, and their renown has lived in the Church (Ecclus. xlv. 14, 15). In heaven it will be part of our joy to see them and be their companions in bliss, and to love them and entertain ourselves with them. The Queen of Saba came from the ends of the earth (St. Matt. xii. 42) to the city in which Solomon had set up his throne, that she might hear the wisdom of his discourses and witness the magnificence of his Court; but the Elect shall be gathered 'from the four winds, from the farthest parts of the heavens to the utmost bounds of them' (St. Matt. xxiv. 31), to sit down in the kingdom of the King of kings with the countless Angels and Saints of the heavenly court, to be enchanted with their beauty and glory. In that glorious company shall be assembled devout patriarchs and prophets, holy apostles and martyrs, illustrious doctors, invincible confessors, chaste virgins, faithful pastors and fervent religious, forming the incomparable phalanx of God's Elect, lustrous with heavenly glory. How it will fill our heart with raptures of delight to behold them, and to enjoy their society, and to hold with them throughout eternity relations of the most fragrant charity!

But look up yet higher. There, seated in magnificence and power at the right hand of God, is the King of Angels and Saints, our most loving Redeemer, inviting us to His embraces, displaying towards us all the tenderest love of His most sacred Heart, and, by all His rights as Redeemer and Saviour, claiming us as His own. We have above all longed to see Him and to be with Him, and now



in heaven our desires shall be for ever satiated. We shall there look on and worship His sacred lips that have taught us the saving truth, His hands that have bound up the wounds of our soul and showered upon us numberless blessings, and His sacred Body and Blood that have nourished us. What an unspeakable joy it will be to us to realize all this!

At the side of Jesus, our King, is Mary His Immaculate Mother, so much loved by Him and by us. We shall gaze upon her glory, and delight in her love; and there, in heaven, she will perfect and crown the work in our regard that she began during our pilgrimage on earth.

Everything in the glorious City of God will fill our hearts with love and inexpressible delight. There we shall experience peace and repose; there perpetual union will reign, where all shall enjoy the clear vision of eternal truth and be put in possession of the Sovereign Good.

We now come, in the third place, to consider that heaven is the kingdom of God's glory, in which the Blessed are in a state of glory. How far above all earthly glory is that which God bestows upon His servants as a reward of their labours in His service! How little has the greatest of human glory to satisfy us! It is short-lived, and its lustre fades with time; it creates for us envies and enmities, and its enjoyment is often impaired or destroyed by calumnies. It is not so with that 'eternal weight of glory' (2 Cor. iv. 17), which fills the large capacity of man's desires and satiates him with delight in the kingdom of heaven—a glory that shall never grow

dim or be impaired. How many joys accompany it! It is accompanied by God's commendation: 'Well done, good and faithful servant' (St. Matt. xxv. 23). It is accompanied by the possession of an everlasting kingdom: 'Possess you the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world' (xxv. 34). It is accompanied by a crown of beauty, 'an incorruptible one' (1 Cor. ix. 25), betokening an imperishable royalty. 'Therefore,' says the Book of Wisdom, 'shall they receive a kingdom of glory, and a crown of beauty at the hand of the Lord' (Wisd. v. 17). It is also accompanied by a communication of dominion and power—as the Psalmist says: 'Thou hast crowned him with glory and honour, and hast set him over the works of Thy hands' (Ps. viii. 6, 7). This is the desired heavenly glory that shall crown all God's works of beneficence, love and mercy for man's salvation. If the means God employed in those works went even to the extent of delivering up to a cruel death His only-begotten Son, with what inexpressible magnificence will He not crown them when He receives man into His kingdom and fittingly adorns him as His own adopted son!

We have now to consider, lastly, the provision made in the heavenly reward for the happiness of the body. Experience teaches us that it is not enough for us to satisfy the mind and heart if the body also is not at ease. Sometimes the sorrows of life proceed only from bodily sufferings. In heaven the body will share in the glory and happiness of the soul, and in the everlasting repose and delights

enjoyed by the Blessed; and thus, then, shall man, in every part of his nature and being, participate in the heavenly reward.

The body will be adorned and endowed with all the qualities of glorified bodies — with beauty, strength, subtlety, impassibility, glory, and immortality. Then shall be realized the new youth like that of the eagle (Ps. cii. 5); 'then,' as our Lord said, 'shall the just shine as the sun in the kingdom of their Father' (St. Matt. xiii. 43); then shall they banquet at the table of God at the perpetual espousals of the Lamb (Ps. cxxvii. 3; Apoc. xix. 7); and then shall they sing the new canticle, and be ever delighted with the hymns of praise that shall resound through the vaults of heaven. In the serenity of God's kingdom man shall partake of that peaceful happiness of soul and body of which we read where it is written: 'Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord' (St. Matt. xxv. 21); and there, too, shall every good be poured into his bosom in that superabundance of which our Lord foretold when He said: 'It shall be given to you; good measure and pressed down and shaken together, and running over shall they give into your bosom' (St. Luke vi. 38). Thus, therefore, shall be realized the fulness of reward foretold for the just by David: 'They shall be inebriated with the plenty of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of Thy pleasure; for with Thee is the fountain of life, and in Thy light we shall see light' (Ps. xxxv. 9, 10).

Great as are the rewards we have been contemplating, it must yet be said that they would not

satisfy the heart of man if he were not assured of the permanent possession of them. As to earthly joys, the greater they are, the greater also is the pang that is felt when they cease ; and they are fleeting, so that on his happiest day a man must say : Alas ! this day will soon be spent. The richest men know well that they and their riches must one day part, and glorious victors are fully aware that their triumphs will be short-lived ; for only a passing satisfaction is afforded by any earthly pleasure, gain, or success. How different will be the heavenly reward ! Its crowning joy will be the perfect and ever-enduring repose that the Blessed shall enjoy in the bosom of God, which also secures for them for all eternity the possession of their blessedness with its countless joys—hence it is called ‘life everlasting’ (Dan. xii. 2 ; St. Matt. xxv. 46). All earthly pleasure, however great, dwindles into insignificance before that heavenly beatitude, which is eternal in its duration, and which therefore imparts to the Blessed a sense of peace, satisfaction, and repose.

Let us, in drawing these considerations to a close, call to mind that our ideas cannot reach a true conception of the happiness and glory prepared by God as the reward of His Elect ; for, as St. Paul tells us, ‘Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love Him.’

You should return thanks to God for the consolation afforded you by this revelation ; you should raise your mind from time to time to contemplate the heavenly reward and your heart to desire it, and

you should ever direct the course of your life towards it. No other honours, riches, possessions, pleasures, or satisfactions are so worthy of your every effort. The thought of this reward should stimulate you in your labours, make you staunch in time of temptation, and sustain you under your trials and sorrows. 'Woe is me,' sang holy David, 'that my sojourning is prolonged' (Ps. cxix. 5). '... My soul hath thirsted after the strong living God; when shall I come and appear before the face of God?' (Ps. xli. 3). '... How lovely are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! my soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of the Lord' (Ps. lxxxiii. 2, 3).

Examine yourselves before the retreat closes to see if any obstacle lies between you and the acquisition of heaven. Be not of the number of those whose life is unworthy by reason of vanity, bitterness, self-indulgence, indifference, or undutifulness; or by reason of the absence of effort, self-restraint, piety, or correction. Let your place be always among the fervent and the virtuous, and let wise and holy principles guide your steps day by day in the path that leads to the reward you hope for.

God has, during these days of meditation and prayer, spoken to your heart; treasure up the heavenly message, and walk in the light it has imparted. There are some who will not listen to God's word, and others who hear but do not heed; but none of these are the true servants of Christ.

St. James says: 'Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only' (i. 22). 'Be renewed in the spirit of your mind' (Eph. iv. 23), and let your desire to

please God in your future life and to prepare for the heavenly reward confirm you in all your good resolutions — especially in those you have formed during the retreat. It is written: 'My elect shall not labour in vain' (Isa. lxxv. 23). Your love of God, your devotedness to your vocation, your strife against the enemies of your salvation, your patience under the trials of life, and your works of piety and mercy, will be fruitful in grace and merit in this world, and, if only you persevere, will secure for you that ever-to-be-desired reward prepared for God's servants in the world to come.



## SUPPLEMENTARY CONFERENCE FOR THE CLOSE OF A RETREAT.

### XXIV.

#### *LOVE OF GOD.*

‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart.’—  
ST. MATT. xxii. 37.

As the subject of our final consideration in this retreat let us take that precept of Divine charity, of which our Lord said: ‘This is the greatest and the first commandment.’ The heart must respond to some attraction. What do we find among men in hearts in which the love of God has not its proper place, or from which it has been driven? Where God’s love does not reign, and where it is not sovereign over every other affection, we find the love of the creature; we find that the Sovereign Good has been put aside for the love of what is miserable, vain, empty, insufficient, and passing, and often even for what is evil and pernicious. Where this is the case, we may say: Poor wretched man, how blind, how foolish, and how wicked you are! Why do you not fulfil the precept? Why do you not love God first and above all?

May this perversity be perhaps found even in the religious state? What shall be said if the person who sets the creature before the Divine Creator is a religious, a member of a religious Institute? How shall we point out to her the error of her ways? In what terms shall we address ourselves to her to upbraid her? Let us invite her to consider her conduct, and let us say to her :

‘ Where, O religious, is your promised fealty and devotedness? where your once effusive fervour? Has your heart gone astray from the true object of its affection? Where are now your wisdom and your religiousness? Shall we ask, where are your sincerity, your gratitude, your virtue, your zeal for your perfection, and even perhaps your zeal for your salvation? Has it been part of your duty to instruct others and to lead them to love God while at the same time you have turned your own heart towards the creature? And, having denied to God the whole love of your heart, have you not to some extent strayed from the path of perfection, and become callous and negligent, or self-complacent and worldly? May it even be suspected that you have fallen from charity? Is it possible that you have put on a semblance of virtue and religiousness, while ambition, envy, uncharitableness, deceit, or a spirit of independence, rebellion, or sensuality have been in your heart? Have you become indifferent, or less exact, about poverty and religious observance? Do not, O religious, deceive yourself: there must be the reality of virtue and religion—appearances will not save you. God, whose

servant you are, will judge you and reward you, not according to what you pretend to be, or according to what you appear to be, but according to what you really are. He sees the reality; and even your neighbour may in time, if not at once, come to see through the outward show.'

To these words of questioning and warning let us add others of instruction and advice. Perhaps this religious does not rightly understand what the precept of Divine charity demands of her. Let us then further say to her:

'Say, O religious, do you love God with your whole heart? If you do not feel that you actually so love Him, do you wish, and are you striving, now to do so? And note well this, that if you have not the earnest desire so to love Him, and if you do not strive so to love Him, your condition is lamentable and dangerous. Nothing else, no personal or worldly advantage, no labour or sacrifice, can supply for this desire and for this effort. If you are brimful of talent, if your praise is on everyone's lips, if your friends are distinguished and without number, if your labours are heroic, and if you are loaded with favours, but if, at the same time, God has this against you, that you do not love Him above all things and with your whole heart, or that you do not at least desire and strive so to love Him—then your condition is lamentable and dangerous. What, we ask, will the wealth and power of cherished friends, or the esteem and honour of all the world, avail you if you have not the approval, protection, love, and favour of God? Grasp then, O religious, the true notion of what your

duty is, of what your preference should be, and of what is alone worthy of all your love, and say to yourself: I must love God in all sincerity, and with my whole heart; and base shall I be if I love Him not, or if I offer Him a divided heart, for God alone is worthy of all my devotedness. He is my First Beginning and Last End; He is my first, continual, and most generous Benefactor: without Him I am lost, and without Him everything else is of no avail. To obey loyally the greatest and first commandment, I must not entertain any thought or desire, say any word, or perform any action, that is opposed to the love I owe Him; nor must I ever, now or in the future, allow any earthly gain or pleasure, or the love of any creature, to turn me from this duty of love which I owe Him.'

We have in these terms upbraided and instructed the religious who has perhaps fallen from charity; let us now apply to ourselves the lesson we have ventured to teach her, and let us study for ourselves this duty of loving God above all things. Opposed to charity is especially mortal sin, which often results from forgetfulness of God or attachment to creatures.

We may say that the first stage in the acquisition of Divine charity is the rejection of the creature in favour of God our Divine Creator. When this stage has been reached, and a dutiful preference has been thoroughly and worshipfully given in our hearts to God, then we are prepared to proceed to the next stage—namely, to give our love of God all the qualities it demands. The final stage is to give our love the perfection of those qualities. Having there-

fore, in the first place, overcome undue love of the creature, which may be described as the everyday obstacle, we must begin to love God as He commands us to do, and as He deserves to be loved.

In order better to understand how, and in what measure, we should love, let us first consider Who it is that we are called upon to love. The object of our love is God, in Himself immeasurable and eternal, and infinite in beauty, holiness, goodness, love, wisdom, mercy, power, and every other perfection. The object of our love is the Sovereign Being, the Sovereign Truth, the Sovereign Good, and our most generous Divine Benefactor. His Wisdom and Goodness are displayed in everything created, as well on earth as in heaven; and by His Almighty Power He preserves and sustains in being everything that is. God is our First Beginning and Last End, indispensable to our being, He Himself transcending in all excellence every creature in an infinite degree; so that it may be said that before Him all creation is dwarfed, and dwindles into nothingness. As the Sovereign Truth He is the necessary object of our mind's worship; and as the Sovereign Good He is the necessary object of the worship of our will. Furthermore, God is our most generous and loving Benefactor, from Whom are all our blessings in every order. He is our Benefactor in the order of nature as our Creator, and in the order of grace as our Redeemer and our Sanctifier. 'God so loved the world as to give His Only-begotten Son' (St. John iii. 16). St. Francis of Sales has said: 'As none shall ever behold God as much

as He is visible, so none shall ever love Him as much as He is amiable.' God's claims, then, to our love are sovereign and irresistible ; therefore is it written : ' He that loveth not abideth in death ' (1 St. John iii. 14). It is also written, on the other hand : ' God is charity ; and he that abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in him ' (1 St. John iv. 16).

Let us now ask what qualities our love of God should have. We are speaking of a supernatural virtue, infused into our heart by the Holy Ghost—a virtue that bears fruit in holy affections, in zeal and devotedness in God's service, and in holy living and good works. Our love of God must be whole-hearted and constant.

Divine charity to be true and dutiful must be whole-hearted. This is conveyed to us by the very terms of the precept : ' Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart.' We should never, therefore, feel that we love God enough, since we are not to set bounds to our love. There are no bounds set to the love God bears us, except the bounds of perfection ; for God cannot love with a love that is imperfect. Seeing that the perfections of God are infinite, and what are consequently His claims to our love, it would be both unjust and unseemly on our part if we were to set limits to our appreciation of God. Our appreciation, which may be regarded as the result of the exercise of our mental faculty, must have its corresponding affection on the part of our heart. As we cannot without offence to God refuse Him our entire appreciation, so neither can we without a like offence refuse Him the whole of our



love. Moreover, God could not in justice to Himself demand of us less than what we owe and can give, namely, the whole love of our heart. This, then, is the precept: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind, and with thy whole strength' (St. Mark xii. 30). Our love must be whole-hearted. This quality comprises every other.

Consider now how this quality shows itself, for love must not be speculative but practical. If our love is whole-hearted, there will not be on our part any drawing back from whatever God may demand of us; any disloyalty in sentiment, speech, or action in His service; or any wish that His designs and dispensations should be other than what they are. If our love is whole-hearted, there will be an entire and devoted fidelity in fulfilling all that God demands of us by His commandments and by the obligations of our vocation. If our love is whole-hearted we shall not act like those who are carried away by self-love and self-will, who find duty irksome, who shorten their devotions and lengthen out their leisure; like those who bring themselves reluctantly to what is ordained, but who run hot-haste after their own unprofitable whims and fancies; or like those who make little account of their sins and failings, provided that these do not interfere with their pleasure and their plans. If our love is whole-hearted we shall not say that all is well so long as we do not commit mortal sin; nor shall we be as those who make little or no effort to avoid venial sin, or to lessen the number of their faults. Finally, if our love

is whole-hearted we shall find our pleasure in trying to please God in all we do; we shall enter with earnestness and joy into the spirit of the Church in her devotions and in her seasons and festivities, and we shall ever love the better gifts, and ever strive to advance in the way of perfection. Let us ask ourselves if we have thus understood what the love of God demands of us.

Divine charity, besides being whole-hearted, must also have the consequent quality of constancy. 'Charity never falleth away.' Perseverance is the key of salvation; faith and hope, without charity, will not unlock the gates of heaven. To be saved we must die in charity with God, and this charity, being the perfection of spiritual gifts, includes also faith and hope. Men are lost because their charity is not constant; it falls away. There must be whole-heartedness in our charity to make it dutiful and acceptable to God; but only constancy and perseverance bring it to its consummation, which is union with God in everlasting life. Charity must not be as the passing day that from dawn to twilight has its various degrees of brightness, but, as the very sun itself ever shining, not affected by the clouds or the storms. Charity must be as the strong golden chain that bears the test of passing trials and temptations without being broken. Since God, by reason of His infinite everlasting perfections, never ceases to be lovable, we must never cease to love Him—our charity must not know either waning or cessation. It must be the delight, as it is the duty, of our life ever to love God, and to prove this love by daily and un-

ceasing devotedness. No other less constant charity will meet God's claim or fulfil His precept. Let us once more ask ourselves if we have thus understood the love that God demands of us.

How excellent as well as necessary is this wholehearted and constant charity ! It is the secret of the sanctity of the Saints and of the heroism of their lives. It should be to all men the powerful magnet drawing their hearts to God. Without it there cannot be true spiritual life or sustained spiritual energy and action. What, indeed, short of God Himself can completely and finally satisfy the desires of man's heart or the needs of his spiritual being ? Nothing, for God Himself has created this necessity, and He alone can satisfy it. He cannot even release us from the obligation of loving Him with our whole heart and always, and the service He demands, the service we owe Him, is that of our love, and it must be rendered freely and dutifully. We should be undutiful, and we should offend against charity, if we were to forget our indebtedness to God, if we were to neglect His claims to our obedience, if we were wilfully to expose ourselves to sin, if we were to cease from striving to please Him, if we were to divide our affection with creatures, if we were to offer Him an intermittent and fitful service or a love that is insincere, if we were to entertain dangerous or inordinate affection for others, and if we were to refuse to conform ourselves with His designs and dispensations. Thank God, although there are many imperfections in our charity, we yet desire to love God with a true and dutiful affection ; and this sincere

affection, succoured by grace, will preserve us from any serious breach of charity, and will make us turn away resolutely from what might deprive us of God's friendship.

We have seen what are the essential qualities of supernatural charity. It is painful to think that men, in their relations with God, fail to be actuated by genuine and dutiful devotedness. Let me, before we go on to consider what are the fruits of charity, point out, in the case of some men, conduct that is unreal and inconstant. Let us hope that no religious are among their number.

There is such a thing as *mock charity*, and there is also a *shallow charity*. A mock charity is content with appearances: there may be evil in the heart and even in conduct, but it must be concealed; the exterior must be faultless. Defend the outer walls, although there is mutiny within; let the exterior of the house be artistic and even gaudy, although there is filth within; do not allow anyone to impeach your conduct, although your principles are rotten; and maintain that you are without blemish, although your heart is diseased. These are some of the phases of mock charity. Such an outward show and pretence of loving God will meet with a rude awakening; for God must in time tear off the pretences, and lay bare the reality. By this mock charity God is not honoured, but dishonoured.

Charity is shallow when it proceeds from interested motives and when it is fickle. If a religious turns to God only when she has special need of protection or of mercy, or when she desires to be

delivered from difficulties or from sickness, and not also at other times and always, there is a shallowness about her charity. The same may be said when a religious quickly turns from the path of fervour and observance, and when after repentance she makes little or no effort at amendment.

Let us understand the nature and faultiness of these two kinds of charity; let us abhor and avoid them, and let us aim at something higher—at true and solid charity. Mock charity yields no spiritual fruit; and shallow charity produces but scant fruit, and this quickly withers. What, however, are the fruits of true supernatural charity? True charity will make us turn resolutely from what is evil; it will be a corrective of self-love and of undue creature-love; it will lift up our character, our motives and principles, our sentiments and aspirations, and our works—it will perfect, spiritualize, and ennoble them. Actuated by true charity, we shall avoid and disregard the dross that clings to human action; we shall strive in all we do to purify our intentions; and we shall seek to please God by doing it well. True charity will prove an incentive to holiness in thought, word, and deed, and to dutifulness in pursuing our vocation. Often then will we say, if only in our heart: ‘My God, I do this, I bear this for Thee: I wish only to please Thee; all for Thee, O my God!’ In such conduct we see the fruit of true charity; this fruit is fresh and rich, and it will be acceptable to God; this conduct will yield a harvest of merits and rewards. How truly the holy writer says: ‘The love of God is honourable

wisdom' (Ecclus. i. 14)! On the other hand, we must declare it to be folly not to love God, or to have only mock charity, or even only a shallow charity. 'He that loveth not, abideth in death.' If, however, we happily love God with true charity, we shall be united to Him, for He will come and make His abode with us (St. John xiv. 23); and from this charity will proceed conformity with the Divine will, fidelity, piety, generosity, and zeal. With this consoling picture of the fruits of charity before us, we may say with David: 'It is good for me to adhere to my God' (Ps. lxxii. 28). As a token of God's love, His fervent servants will experience His special providence, which will not desert them in trials and afflictions; for St. Paul assures us: 'To them that love God all things work together unto good' (Rom. viii. 28).

With this short and incomplete study of the love of God before our mind, what do we now purpose? Let us not depart from God by sin, indifference, tepidity, or neglect. The days of our sojourning may be drawing to a close; we hope after them to be admitted to the everlasting kingdom of God's love. Charity alone will secure it for us. Although we have all knowledge, all wisdom, all tongues, all wealth, all esteem, what will these things avail us for eternal life without charity? (1 Cor. xiii. 3). What we want is charity, true charity; we want to be able to say with St. Peter: 'Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee' (St. John xxi. 17). If our charity has not been whole-hearted and constant, if it has



been weak and fitful, we shall sincerely regret our want of compliance with the Divine precept. We are determined, God helping us, not again to waste our energy or our time in seeking what is unprofitable; we will seek above all things to love God, and to love Him as He should be loved—that is, with our whole heart and always. ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind.’

Let us ask if God is so loved. What do we see? We see men whose hearts are cold and turned to creatures; they do not pray, they are given inordinately to worldliness and pleasure, and to the love of riches. These do not love God with *all their heart*. What do we see? We see men sensual and perverse in their desires; they have gone aside from virtue; they perceive not the things that are of the Spirit (1 Cor. ii. 14), but mind the things that are of the flesh (Rom. viii. 5); they are enemies of the cross of Christ, and mind earthly things (Phil. iii. 19). These do not love God with *their whole soul*. What do we see? We see men fall away in the hour of temptation; we see them shirk the duties of their calling; we see them victims of human respect; we see that they have fallen off from God. These do not love God with *all their strength*. What do we see? We see men in unbelief, or walking in the paths of error; we see them heedless of religion both in faith and practice; we see men whose thoughts, early and late, are about business, earthly prosperity or distinction, or about vanity, but who do not think of God,

and who do not thank Him for the bounties and mercies of His providence. These do not love God with *all their mind*.

What, then, must we say? We must say with sorrow that God is not loved. What, then, must we do? We must strive, by our efforts, prayers, and example that God may be loved. We must desire that the flames of Divine love may ever burn in our own heart, and it must be our constant endeavour to walk in the paths of fervour and piety.

I picture to myself a devout religious in prayer, expressing in brief ejaculations the pious emotions of her soul. I invite you to enter in silence into her sentiments and to join in her prayer. O God, she says, I love Thee with my whole heart and above all things because Thou hast made me to love Thee, and because Thou hast first loved me. I love Thee, O adorable Trinity, whose perfections are infinite. I love Thee, O loving Saviour, because Thou hast become man to love me with a human Heart, and because Thou hast suffered and died for me. I behold the anguish of Thy Spirit, Thy Body covered with wounds, the outpouring of all Thy Blood, Thy exhaustion and the passing of Thy Soul in death—and all this for my sake. I see Thee continuing for my sake the work of Thy grace on earth through Thy Church and through the holy sacraments, and I possess Thee in the Divine Eucharist. I see, too, with sorrow that many do not love Thee. Bestow upon me, O Lord, Thy grace that I may love Thee—love Thee now, love Thee to the end, love Thee for ever.

Let me now say in conclusion that there can be but little hope of your perseverance in fervour, and in religious dutifulness, after your retreat if you do not at least desire to have this perfect love. Cast away, then, and avoid whatever is contrary to this true charity. St. Paul said: 'The things that were gain to me, the same I have counted loss for Christ' (Phil. iii. 7). You have studied what charity is; it remains now that you should strive to practise it. Be desirous of its fruits, and labour for its rewards. Such being your desire and determination, beg God's grace and blessing in fervent prayer. Let this be your prayer: 'Deign now, O Lord, to receive our hearts and our good resolutions; deign to bless our efforts with the grace of perseverance. We do not wish ever to fall away from charity, but we desire to increase in fervour. Keep us ever in Thy service, and vouchsafe to bestow on us the graces we need to make us ever devout religious. And, O Mary Immaculate, our heavenly Mother, and, O blessed Joseph, our powerful Protector! do you plead for us that we may remain ever true to our privileged vocation, and ever grateful for the countless blessings God has deigned to bestow upon us. To you we confide our fervent resolutions; and under your loving patronage, aided by your powerful intercession, we hope to persevere to the end, to reach the goal of a happy death, and to attain to the heavenly reward. Amen.'

## CORRECTIONS IN SERIES I. AND II.

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### FIRST SERIES.

P. 107, 1st line. *After* 'when' *read*: 'The people had kept some of the herds and flocks of Amelec, instead of destroying them as commanded by God, and Saul pretended that they were to supply victims for sacrifice. Doth the Lord,' etc.

P. 236, 3rd line. *Instead of* 'foundation' *read* 'fountain.'

P. 269, 20th line. *Instead of* 'of his degree' *read* 'of his capacity.'

### SECOND SERIES.

P. 316, 22nd line. *The sentence beginning* 'Addressing' *should be as follows*: 'St. Augustine represents our Lord as saying to him: Thou wilt not change Me into thyself, as though I should become the food of thy flesh, but thou wilt be changed into Me.' (*Footnote*: 'Nec tu Me mutabis in te sicut cibum carnis tuæ, sed tu mutaberis in Me.')

LIST OF THE SUBJECTS OF THE CONFERENCES  
WHICH COMPRISE THE FIRST SERIES.

- I. THE RETREAT.
- II. RELIGIOUS PROFESSION.
- III. HOLY POVERTY.
- IV. SIN IN A RELIGIOUS.
- V. MEDITATION.
- VI. HOLY CHASTITY.
- VII. NEGLECT.
- VIII. PURITY OF INTENTION.
- IX. HOLY OBEDIENCE.
- X. DEATH.
- XI. OBSERVANCE OF RULE.
- XII. CONFESSION.
- XIII. INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR LIFE.
- XIV. TEACHINGS OF THE PASSION.
- XV. HOLY COMMUNION.
- XVI. DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN.
- XVII. THE WAY OF THE SAINTS.
- XVIII. HUMAN FRAILTY.
- XIX. RECOURSE TO THE SACRED HEART.
- XX. CONFIDENCE IN GOD.
- XXI. RECOMPENSE.
- XXII. LOVE OF GOD.
- XXIII. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS.

LIST OF THE SUBJECTS OF THE CONFERENCES  
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- I. THE RETREAT.
- II. GOD'S DESIGNS REGARDING US.
- III. CORRESPONDENCE WITH GOD'S DESIGNS.
- IV. MORTAL SIN.
- V. TEPIDITY.
- VI. RELIGIOUS VOCATION.
- VII. DISENTHUSIASM.
- VIII. TEMPTATIONS.
- IX. HUMILITY.
- X. CONVERSION.
- XI. GOD'S MERCY.
- XII. PIETY.
- XIII. DEATH.
- XIV. THE DISCIPLINE OF OBEDIENCE.
- XV. INTERIOR RECOLLECTION.
- XVI. JUDGMENT.
- XVII. CONFORMITY WITH THE DIVINE WILL.
- XVIII. PRAYER.
- XIX. THE WAY OF PEACE.
- XX. LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOUR.
- XXI. THE HOLY EUCHARIST.
- XXII. RECOURSE TO MARY.
- XXIII. PERSEVERANCE.



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Both the above works have been compiled and composed for the use of Colleges, Convents, and the Faithful generally.



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